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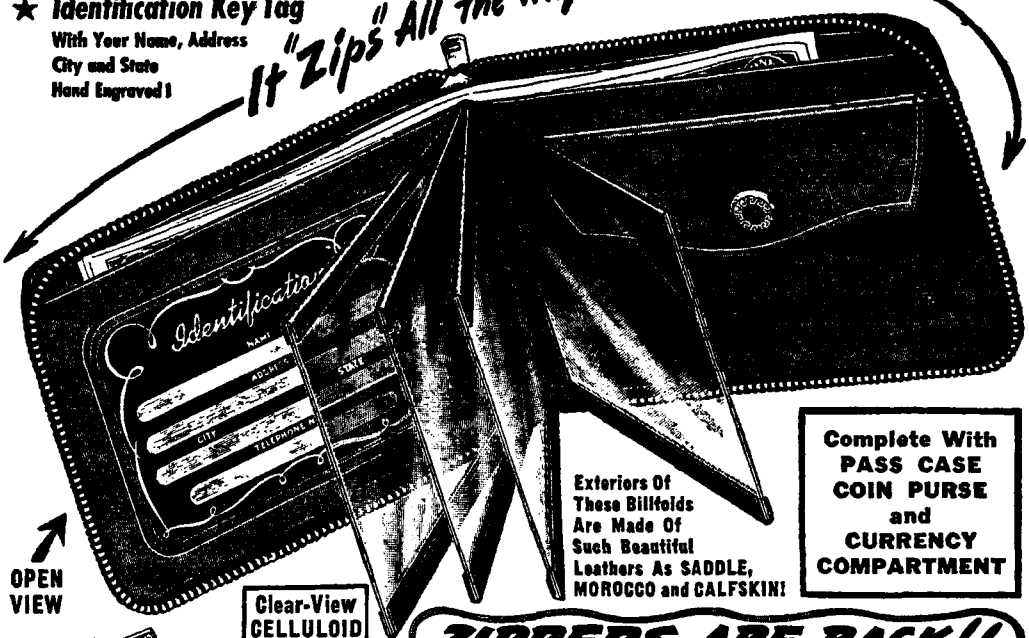

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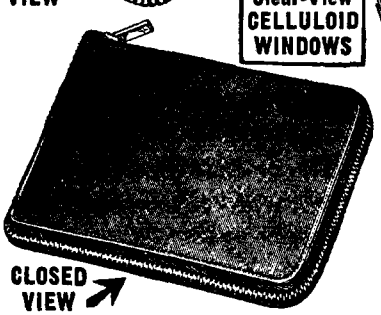

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VOL. VI JUNE, 1945 NO. 5

Two Book-Length Novels

The Boats of the *Glen Carrig* **William Hope Hodgson** **10**

They sailed an uncharted course over the edge of the world . . . into a land ruled by nameless horror and peopled by men and women shipwrecked on the shore of an unknown domain.

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Even a Worm **J. S. Bradford** **78**

"It is enough," said the quiet voice. "From to-day the blood pact is on you all. From the worm to the elephant, you are all blood brothers. The troth is sworn, and the enemy is Man."

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The Readers' Viewpoint **6**

The New Lawrence Portfolio **77**

In the Next Issue **117**

Cover and illustrations by Lawrence.

All stories in this publication are either new or have never appeared in a magazine.

Published quarterly by All-Fiction Field, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, 16, Ill. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City, 17. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second class matter May 28, 1943, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1945, by All-Fiction Field, Inc. Single copy price 25c. Yearly subscription $1.00 in United States, its dependencies, and Mexico and Cuba. Other countries, $1.35. Subscription Dept. 205 E. 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose self-addressed stamped envelope for their return if found unavailable and send them to Editorial Dept., 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them. All rights reserved under Pan American copyright convention. Printed in U. S. A.

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

"MACHINE STOPS" ENCHANTING

Dear Editor:

The March F.F.M. came swirling into town in the teeth of a howling tempest of wind, and eventually found its way to a spot immediately below my inquisitive brown eyes—where it remained until I had finished "The Machine Stops."

Wayland Smith wove an enchanting story in this novel—so real that even now I half expect my typewriter to collapse in a heap of greenish-blue powder. "The Machine Stops" had a good idea behind it, and it was carried out with vivid skill. Congratulations to everybody responsible for it seeing the light of day in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries.*

One thing rather puzzles me—was the rest of the world in the same fix as England? If so, what happened? And, if not, why no aid to the British Isles? A minor point perhaps, but I don't like loose threads left over when I reach the final page.

Lawrence's illustrations for the novel were his usual fine work, and I found the cover effective too, despite many fans' criticisms of his paintings.

Glad to see the black background is back—to stay, I hope.

Henry Kuttner, one of the very finest modern writers in my humble opinion, certainly lived up to my expectations in "Before I Wake." It was a beautiful fantasy, and Lawrence's illustration is about the best work of his I've seen to date. Which is saying something!

"The Readers' Viewpoint" continues to be a real asset to the magazine—almost competing with the fiction in interest! All in all, the March F.F.M. was quite an issue. The new policy seems to be paying off now, and if it wasn't for "The Ship of Ishtar" all would be perfect. But we're lucky to get the magazine at all, so there are certainly no kicks from here.

CHAD OLIVER

c/o MRS. C. L. COLEMAN,
CRYSTAL CITY, TEX.

Editor's Note: We were pretty well satisfied that lack of communication with the rest of the world was caused by breakdown of wires, etc.

A GREAT NOVEL

I have purchased—although not always read—every issue of F.F.M. since its inception back in the far, far better days of 1939. However, to the best of my knowledge I have never written a letter of comment on the magazine during all that time.

Many a fine story I have read in F.F.M., but up until now none have ever prompted me to write. What brought about the change was the novel in the March issue, "The Machine Stops" by Wayland Smith.

To my mind this is one of the better science fiction stories ever published—and certainly one of the top yarns ever to have appeared in F.F.M.

It was not Mr. Smith's plot that made this story great, nor was it his originality. The general outline of the story was not too far removed from Wright's "Deluge" or any of the other "plague" tales.

What made Smith's novel as interesting as it was proved to be his writing. The manner in which he pictured the attitude of the average man when faced with something beyond his conception was so typical and true to life. The author's characters were so human and their thoughts and actions were so realistic.

Smith put into words the futility of mankind; how human nature reacts to a great calamity. The first four chapters of the story were the best, I thought. It was the small characters in these chapters who caught my fancy—the people on the street car, the little man who had his savings in Central Steel, Blunt, Claudius, the furniture dealer, and all the rest. And then the final touch of irony—the dying words of old Sylvanus Dale. All these minor items joined together were what made the story appeal to me.

The illustrations were quite good, although I wonder at the one on page 57 which is supposed to picture the fall of Severn Bridge. I thought it was supposed to be a suspension bridge Jamieson was building, yet the one in the illustration is not a suspension affair.

At any rate, the story was fine—which is what really counts.

GERRY DE LA REE

9 BOGART PLACE,
WESTWOOD, N. J.

Editor's Note: You are entirely right about the Severn Bridge. Lawrence slipped up on that one.

ANOTHER HIT

I certainly did enjoy the story in the new F.F.M.—"The Machines Stops." I like stories of that kind, there is something fascinating about the theme used—civilized man, so used to conveniences and soft living—suddenly confronted with the necessity of doing without. Something of this nature was also found in England's "Darkness and Dawn"—et al—which F.F.M. once carried, where Stern woke, and found his known world in ruins. In this story by Smith, his angle of metal deterioration was novel (to me, anyway), and I thought he handled his plot cleverly throughout. May I say

(Continued on page 8)

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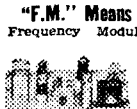

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(Continued from page 6)

that with "The Machine Stops," F.F.M. continues its "Hit Parade"!

THYRIL L. LADD

33 CUYLER AVENUE,
ALBANY 2, N. Y.

A NEW FRIEND

Not too long ago a copy of your magazine, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, turned up at our house. We now have our own Fantastic Mystery as no one bought or brought it, or at any rate no one will admit having done so.

In the same spirit that I occasionally glance through my small daughter's comic books I read a bit of the novel. The story picked me up and took me to a world of an author's imagination and there was no return until the novel had been read from beginning to end.

I also read the letters from your fans and noticed that nearly all of them are sticky with flattery and salty with criticism. So here you may have my praise and "gripe" all at once. I am very much annoyed at all the people, who formed my opinion *for* me, who insist that all pulp magazines are trash. There is no use trying to reform them as they are too narrow-minded and bigoted to admit they haven't a solid basis of personal knowledge to bolster up their claim. So I have decided to give each and every one the same chance someone gave to me. From now on there will be pulp magazins with gaudy covers mysteriously appearing in the homes of these people. There will now be one moment of silence while all who read this cross their fingers and hope for the best.

Said best being "The Lost Continent" by Cutcliffe Hyne in the December issue. I hope we may expect more novels of such excellence. It was beautifully written.

Thank you, Mr. Editor, if you are the one who plows through all the manuscripts and picks the best for printing.

JEAN PAULE

526 LYON ST.,
SAN FRANCISCO 17, CALIF.

"MACHINE STOPS"—OKAY

I have just finished your latest issue and I wish to say that the story "The Machine Stops" was good. I of course can't say that the theory of the metal corrosion could be true but the reaction of the public was certainly correct. They were not able to get it through their heads what had happened and what would happen. They went around yelling that it was all a plot of the dirty capitalists to enslave the poor working man. I have already heard that remark so many times that I could just picture the whole scene.

The crowds running around amid the scenes of wreckage destroying what hadn't as yet been destroyed as if that would help matters any. Instead of organizing and trying to bring order out of chaos they just went on an orgy of murder and looting. It was a sad commentary on the human race but absolutely true as the human animal will always act that way. There is absolutely no reason for it but they will do it every time. It seems to give them pleasure.

EDWIN SIGLER

616 NORTH TOPEKA,
WICHITA, KANSAS

LAWRENCE MARVELOUS

Lawrence isn't better than Virgil Finlay, the Old Master, but sometimes he equals him, as in his illustrations for Kuttner's "Before I Wake," and the full pages of "The Machine Stops," and his excellent frontispiece for Chesterton's "The Man Who Was Thursday." (The best novel you've published since you adopted your new policy.) It was excellent. All this is leading up to this: Enclosed is $1.25 for a year's subscription to F.F.M. and the Lawrence Portfolio.

When you get enough of his full-pages, how about a Ronald Clyne Portfolio? He's as good as Lawrence. And a *Bok* porfolio. I'm dying for a copy, on glossed paper, of the half-page lead drawing he did for "The Mask"—I want to frame it. Sleeping beauty and the black, statuesque figures. What a drawing! How about a special issue of short stories once in a while, each with a full-page illustration? Dunsany's "Highwayman" was great. Clyne's drawing marvelous. A Clyne Portfolio soon, please. Oh, yes—I want my subscription to begin with the June issue.

FRANK MCSHERRY, JR.

314 WEST JACKSON,
MCALISTER, OKLAHOMA

BREATH-TAKING

Being a newcomer to your mag, and having three issues, I decided to make a few comments.

Now starting with the Sept. issue. I had just come out of a matinee and from force of habit went into the nearest newsstand, and there it was! *Famous Fantastic Mysteries.* Such a cover! I greedily rushed forward and snatched it up yelling "Mine! Mine! Mine!" and rushed out of the riot with my priceless treasure. I could hear the enraged customers stampeding after me. That night I read it from cover to cover. "The Day of the Brown Horde" was very good except that it was a little draggy. Those illustrations on pages 8, 23, and 41 were pips. "The Postman of Otford" wasn't so hot.

The Dec. issue, fair. "The Lost Continent" slightly wishy washy. That was a good picture on page 10. Now "The Highwayman." That was good. Let's have more weird stuff like that.

Now we come to the March issue. A good cover, a good mag. It's hard to choose words to describe "The Machine Stops." It was breath-taking from beginning to end and it had actual, good old-fashioned "blood and thunder." And just look at page 57. "Hot Dog." I counted fifteen falling men.

ROGER REHM

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(Continued on page 118)

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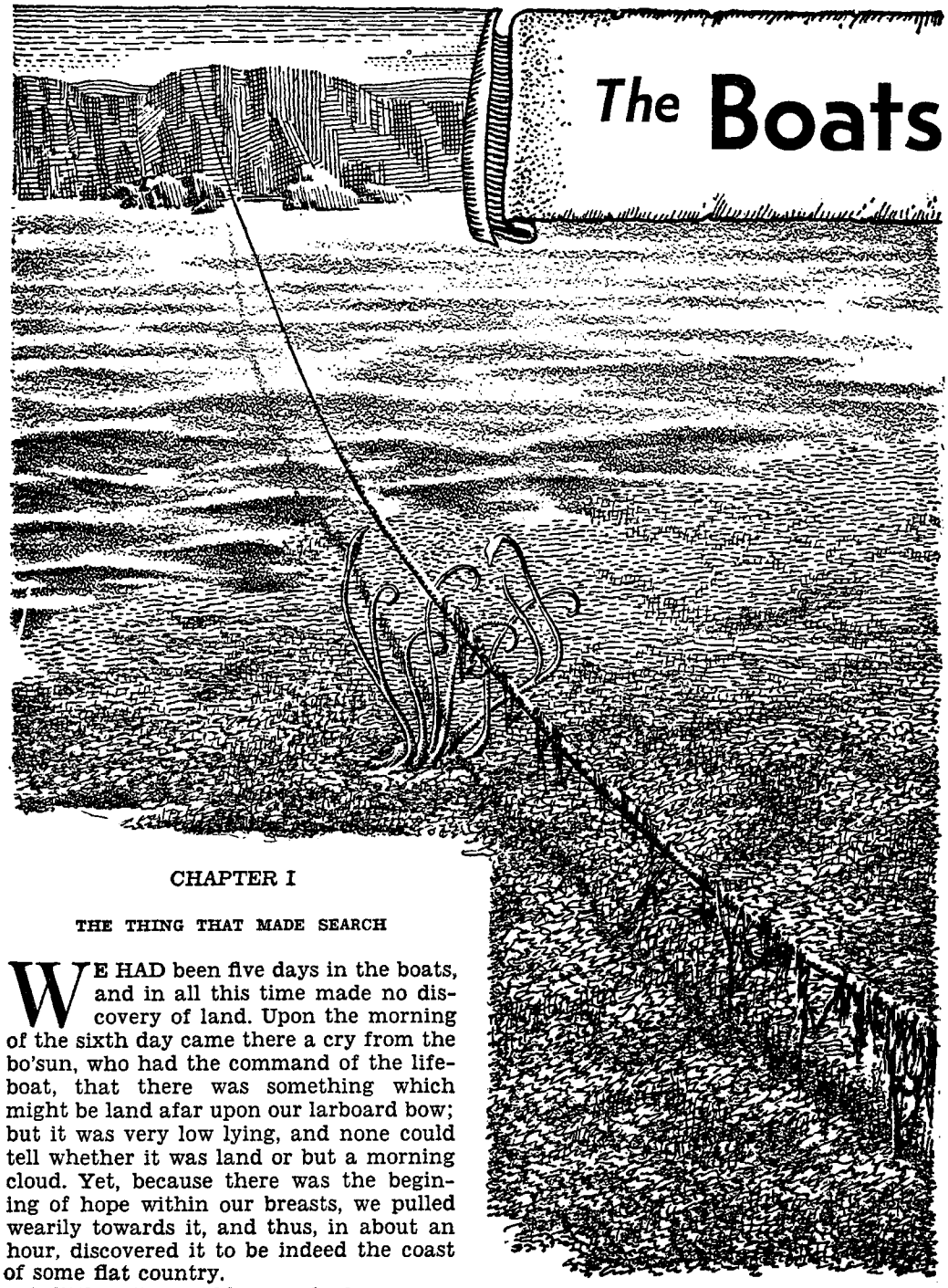
The Boats



The warping of the ship

CHAPTER I

THE THING THAT MADE SEARCH

WE HAD been five days in the boats, and in all this time made no discovery of land. Upon the morning of the sixth day came there a cry from the bo'sun, who had the command of the lifeboat, that there was something which might be land afar upon our larboard bow; but it was very low lying, and none could tell whether it was land or but a morning cloud. Yet, because there was the beginning of hope within our breasts, we pulled wearily towards it, and thus, in about an hour, discovered it to be indeed the coast of some flat country.

A little after midday we had come so close to it that we could distingush with ease what manner of land lay beyond the shore, and thus we found it to be of an abominable flatness, desolate beyond all that I could have imagined. Here and there

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of the *Glen Carrig*

By William Hope Hodgson

They sailed an uncharted course over the edge of the world . . . into a land ruled by nameless horror and peopled by men and women shipwrecked on the shore of an unknown domain.

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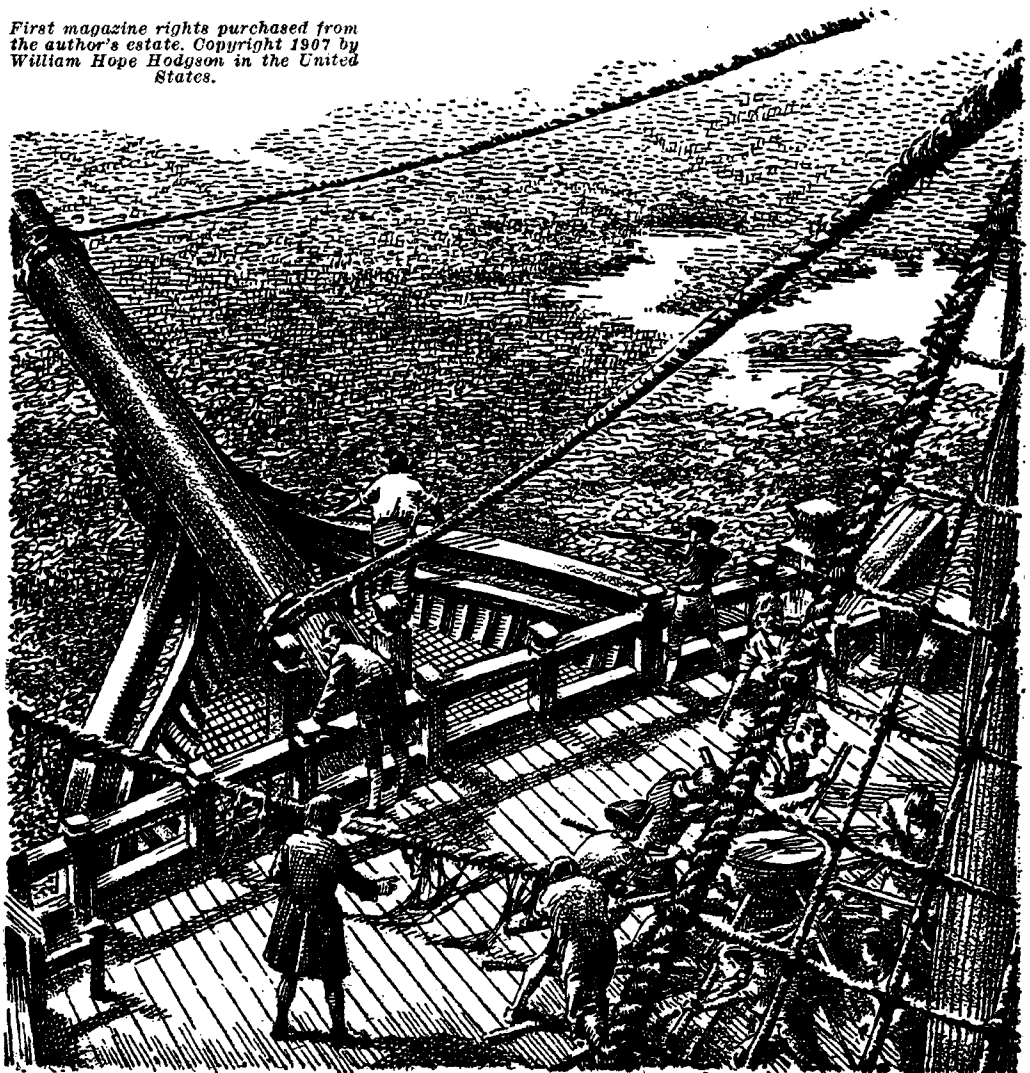

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it appeared to be covered with clumps of queer vegetation; though whether they were small trees or great bushes I had no means of telling; but this I know, that they were like unto nothing which ever I had set eyes upon before.

So much as this I gathered as we pulled slowly along the coast, seeking an opening whereby we could pass inward to the land; but a weary time passed or ere we came upon that which we sought. In the end, we found it—a slimy-banked creek, which proved to be the estuary of a great river, though we spoke of it always as a creek. Into this we entered, and proceeded at no great pace upwards along its winding course; and as we made forward we scanned the low banks upon each side, perchance there might be some spot where we could make to land. But we found none—the banks being composed of a vile mud which gave us no encouragement to venture rashly upon them.

Having taken the boat something over a mile up the great creek, we came upon the first of that vegetation which I had chanced to notice from the sea, and here, being within some score yards of it, we were the better able to study it. I found that it was indeed composed largely of a sort of tree, very low and stunted, and having what might be described as an unwholesome look about it. The branches of this tree I perceived to be the cause of my inability to recognize it from a bush until I had come close upon it. They grew thin and smooth through all their length, and hung towards the earth; being weighted thereto by a single, large cabbage-like plant which seemed to sprout from the extreme tip of each.

Having passed beyond this first clump of the vegetation, and the banks of the river remaining very low, I stood me upon a thwart, by which means I was enabled to scan the surrounding country. This I discovered, so far as my sight could penetrate, to be pierced in all directions with innumerable creeks and pools, some of these latter being very great of extent. And everywhere the country was low set—as it might be a great plain of mud, so that it gave me a sense of dreariness to look out upon it.

It may be, all unconsciously, that my spirit was put in awe by the extreme silence of all the country around. In all that waste I could see no living thing, neither bird nor vegetable, save it be the stunted trees, which, indeed, grew in clumps here and there over all the land.

This silence, when I grew fully aware of it, was the more uncanny; for my memory told me that never before had I come upon a country which contained so much quietness.

Nothing moved across my vision—not even a lone bird soared up against the dull sky; and, for my hearing, not so much as the cry of a sea-bird came to me—no! nor the croak of a frog, nor the plash of a fish. It was as though we had come upon the Country of Silence, which some have called the Land of Lonesomeness.

THREE hours had passed whilst we ceased not to labour at the oars and we could no more see the sea; yet no place fit to our feet had come to view, for everywhere the mud, grey and black, surrounded us—encompassing us veritably by a slimy wilderness. We were fain to pull on, in the hope that we might come ultimately to firm ground.

A little before sundown we halted upon our oars and made a scant meal from a portion of our remaining provisions, and as we ate I could see the sun sinking away over the wastes. I had some slight diversion in watching the grotesque shadows which it cast from the trees into the water upon our larboard side, for we had come to a pause opposite a clump of the vegetation. It was at this time that it was borne in upon me afresh how very silent was the land, and that this was not due to my imagination. I remarked that the men both in our own and in the bo'sun's boat seemed uneasy because of it, for none spoke save in undertones, as though they had fear of breaking that silence.

While I was awed by so much solitude, there came the first telling of life in all that wilderness. I heard it first in the far distance, away inland—a curious, low, sobbing note it was, and the rise and the fall of it was like to the sobbing of a lonesome wind through a great forest. Yet was there no wind. In a moment, it had died, and the silence of the land was awesome by reason of the contrast.

I looked about me at the men, both in the boat in which I was and that which the bo'sun commanded; and not one was there but held himself in a posture of listening. In this wise a minute of quietness passed, and then one of the men gave out a laugh, born of the nervousness which had taken him.

The bo'sun muttered to him to hush, and, in the same moment, there came again the plaint of that wild sobbing. Abruptly it

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sounded away on our right, and immediately was caught up, as it were, and echoed back from some place beyond us afar up the creek. At that, I got me upon a thwart, intending to take another look over the country about us; but the banks of the creek had become higher. Moreover, the vegetation acted as a screen, even had my stature and elevation enabled me to overlook the banks.

After a little while the crying died away, and there was another silence. Then, as we sat each one harking for what might next befall, George, the youngest 'prentice boy, who had his seat beside me, plucked me by the sleeve, inquiring in a troubled voice whether I had any knowledge of that which the crying might portend. But I shook my head, telling him that I had no knowing beyond his own; though, for his comfort, I said that it might be the wind. At that, he shook his head; for indeed, it was plain that it could not be by such agency, for there was a stark calm.

I had scarce made an end of my remark when again the sad crying was upon us. It appeared to come from far up the creek, and from far down the creek, and from inland and the land between us and the sea. It filled the evening air with its doleful wailing, and I remarked that there was in it a curious sobbing, most human in its despairful crying. So awesome was the thing that no man of us spoke; for it seemed that we harked to the weeping of lost souls. And as we waited fearfully the sun sank below the edge of the world, and the dusk was upon us.

And now a more extraordinary thing happened; for, as the night fell with swift gloom, the strange wailing and crying was hushed, and another sound stole out upon the land—a far, sullen growling. At the first, like the crying, it came from far inland; but was caught up speedily on all sides of us, and presently the dark was full of it. It increased in volume, and strange trumpetings fled across it. Then, though with slowness, it fell away to a low, continuous growling, and in it there was that which I can only describe as an insistent, hungry snarl. Aye! no other word of which I have knowledge so well describes it as that—a note of *hunger,* most awesome to the ear. This, more than all the rest of those incredible voicings, brought terror into my heart.

As I sat listening, George gripped me suddenly by the arm, declaring in a shrill whisper that something had come among the clump of trees upon the left bank.

I caught the sound of a continuous rustling among them, and then a nearer note of growling, as though a wild beast purred at my elbow. Immediately upon this, I caught the bo'sun's voice, calling in a low tone to Josh, the eldest 'prentice, who had the charge of our boat, to come alongside of him; for he would have the boats together. Then got we out the oars, and laid the boats together in the midst of the creek. And so we watched through the night, being full of fear, so that we kept our speech low; that is, so low as would carry our thoughts one to the other through the noise of the growling.

THE hours passed and naught happened more than I have told, save that once, a little after midnight, the trees opposite to us seemed to be stirred again, as though some creature, or creatures, lurked among them. And there came, a little after that, a sound as of something stirring the water up against the bank; but it ceased in a while, and the silence fell once more.

After a weariful time, away eastwards the sky began to tell of the coming of the day; and, as the light grew and strengthened, so did that insatiable growling pass hence with the dark and the shadows. At last came the day, and once more there was borne to us the sad wailing that had preceded the night. For a certain while it lasted, rising and falling most mournfully over the vastness of the surrounding wastes, until the sun was risen some degrees above the horizon; after which it began to fail, dying away in lingering echoes, most solemn to our ears. And so it passed, and there came again the silence that had been constantly with us in all the daylight hours.

Now, it being day, the bo'sun bade us make such sparse breakfast as our provender allowed; after which, having first scanned the banks to discern if any fearful thing were visible, we took again to our oars, and proceeded on our upward journey. We hoped presently to come upon a country where life had not become extinct, and where we could put foot to honest earth. Yet, as I have made mention earlier, the vegetation, where it grew, did flourish most luxuriantly; so that I am scarce correct when I speak of life as being extinct in that land. I can remember that the very mud from which it sprang seemed veritably to have a fat, sluggish life of its own, so rich and viscid was it.

At midday there but little change in the nature of the surrounding wastes; though

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it may be that the vegetation was something thicker, and more continuous along the banks. But the banks were still of the same thick, clinging mud; so that nowhere could we effect a landing; though, had we, the rest of the country beyond the banks seemed no better.

As we pulled, we glanced continuously from bank to bank; and those who worked not at the oars were fain to rest a hand by their sheath-knives. The happenings of the past night were continually in our minds, and we were in great fear; so that we had turned back to the sea, but that we had come so nigh to the end of our provisions.

Nigh on to evening we came upon a creek opening into the greater one through the bank upon our left. We had been like to pass it—as, indeed, we had passed many throughout the day—but that the bo'sun, whose boat had the lead, cried out that there was some craft lying-up, a little beyond the first bend. One of the masts of her—all jagged, where it had carried away—stuck up plain to our view.

Having grown sick with so much lonesomeness, and being in fear of the approaching night, we gave out something near to a cheer, which, however, the bo'sun silenced, having no knowledge of those who might occupy the stranger. In silence, the bo'sun turned his craft towards the creek, whereat we followed, taking heed to keep quietness, and working the oars warily. In a little, we came to the shoulder of the bend, and had plain sight of the vessel some little way beyond us. From the distance she had no appearance of being inhabited; so that, after some small hesitation, we pulled towards her, though still being at pains to keep silence.

The strange vessel lay against that bank of the creek which was upon our right, and over above her was a thick clump of the stunted trees. For the rest, she appeared to be firmly imbedded in the heavy mud, and there was a certain look of age about her which carried to me a doleful suggestion that we should find naught aboard of her fit for an honest stomach.

We had come to a distance of maybe some ten fathoms from her starboard bow—for she lay with her head down towards the mouth of the little creek—when the bo'sun bade his men to back water, the which Josh did regarding our own boat. Being ready to fly if we had been in danger, the bo'sun hailed the stranger; but got no reply, save that some echo of his shout seemed to come back at us. He sung out again to her, chance there might be some below decks who had not caught his first hail. But still no answer came to us, save the low echo—naught, but that the silent trees took on a little quivering, as though his voice had shaken them.

Being confident now within our minds, we laid alongside, and, in a minute, had shinned up the oars, and gained her decks. Here, save that the glass of the skylight of the main cabin had been broken, and some portion of the framework shattered, there was no extraordinary litter; so that it appeared to us as though she had been no great while abandoned.

When the bo'sun had made his way up from the boat he turned aft towards the scuttle, the rest of us following. We found the leaf of the scuttle pulled forward to within an inch of closing, and so much effort did it require of us to push it back that we had immediate evidence of a considerable time since any had gone down that way.

It was no great while before we were below, and here we found the main cabin to be empty, save for the bare furnishings. From it there opened off two state-rooms at the forrard end, and the captain's cabin in the after part, and in all of these we found matters of clothing and sundries such as proved that the vessel had been deserted apparently in haste. In further proof of this we found, in a drawer in the captain's room, a considerable quantity of loose gold, the which it was not to be supposed would have been left by the free-will of the owner.

OF THE state-rooms, the one upon the starboard side gave evidence that it had been occupied by a woman—no doubt a passenger. The other, in which there were two bunks, had been shared, so far as we could have any certainty, by a couple of young men. This we gathered by observation of various garments which were scattered carelessly about.

We spent no great time in the cabins, for we were pressed for food, and made haste—under the directing of the bo'sun—to discover if the hulk held victuals whereby we might be kept alive.

We removed the hatch which led down to the lazarette, and, lighting two lamps which we had with us in the boats, went down to make a search. In a little while, we came upon two casks which the bo'sun broke open with a hatchet. These casks were sound and tight, and in them was ship's biscuit, very good and fit for food.

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At this, as may be imagined, we felt eased in our minds, knowing that there was no immediate fear of starvation. Following this, we found a barrel of molasses; a cask of rum; some cases of dried fruit—these were mouldy and scarce fit to be eaten; a cask of salt beef, another of pork; a small barrel of vinegar; a case of brandy; two barrels of flour—one of which proved to be dampstruck; and a bunch of tallow dips.

In a little while we had all these things up in the big cabin, so that we might come at them the better to make choice of that which was fit for our stomachs, and that which was otherwise. Meantime, whilst the bo'sun overhauled these matters, Josh called a couple of the men, and went on deck to bring up the gear from the boats; for it had been decided that we should pass the night aboard the hulk.

When this was accomplished, Josh took a walk forrard to the fo'cas'le; but found nothing beyond two seamen's chests, a sea-bag, and some odd gear. There were, indeed, no more than ten bunks in the place; for she was but a small brig, and had no call for a great crowd.

Josh was more than a little puzzled to know what had come to the odd chests; for it was not to be supposed that there had been no more than two—and a sea-bag—among ten men. But to this, at that time, he had no answer, and being sharp for supper, made a return to the deck, and thence to the main cabin.

While he had been gone, the bo'sun had set the men to clearing out the main cabin; after which he had served out two biscuits apiece all round, and a tot of rum. To Josh, when he appeared, he gave the same, and, in a little, we called a sort of council; being sufficiently stayed by the food to talk.

Before we came to speech, we made shift to light our pipes; for the bo'sun had discovered a case of tobacco in the captain's cabin, and after this we came to the consideration of our position.

We had provender, so the bo'sun calculated, to last us for the better part of two months, and this without any great stint. But we had yet to prove if the brig held water in her casks, for that in the creek was brackish, even so far as we had penetrated from the sea; else we had not been in need. To the charge of this, the bo'sun set Josh, along with two of the men. Another, he told to take charge of the galley,

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Men, it's the sharpest one that's made!
New kind of edges on steel hard enough to cut glass
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so long as we were in the hulk. For that night, he said we had no need to do aught; for we had sufficient of water in the boats' breakers to last us till the morrow.

The dusk began to fill the cabin, but we talked on, being greatly content with our present ease and the good tobacco which we enjoyed.

In a little while, one of the men cried out suddenly to us to be silent, and, in that minute, all heard it—a far, drawn-out wailing; the same which had come to us in the evening of the first day. We looked at one another through the smoke and the growing dark, and even as we looked, it became plainer heard. In a while it was all about us—aye! it seemed to come floating down through the broken framework of the skylight, as though some weariful, unseen thing stood and cried upon the decks above our heads.

Through all that crying none moved; none, that is, save Josh and the bo'sun, and they went up into the scuttle to see whether anything was in sight. But they found nothing, and so came down to us; for there was no wisdom in exposing ourselves, unarmed as we were, save for our sheath-knives.

The night crept down upon the world, and still we sat within the dark cabin, none speaking, and knowing of the rest only by the glows of their pipes.

All at once, there came a low, muttered growl, stealing across the land; and immediately the crying was quenched in its sullen thunder. It died away, and there was a full minute of silence; then, once more it came, and it was nearer and more plain to the ear. I took my pipe from my mouth; for I had come again upon the great fear and uneasiness which the happenings of the first night had bred in me, and the taste of the smoke brought me no more pleasure. The muttered growl swept over our heads and died away into the distance, and there was a sudden silence.

In that quietness, came the bo'sun's voice. He was bidding us haste every one into the captain's cabin. As we moved to obey him, he ran to draw over the lid of the scuttle; and Josh went with him, and, together, they had it across; though with difficulty. When we had come into the captain's cabin, we closed and barred the door, piling two great sea-chests up against it; and so we felt near safe; for we knew that no thing, man or beast, could come at us there. Yet, as may be supposed, we felt not altogether secure; for there was that in the growling which now filled the darkness, that seemed demoniac, and we knew not what horrid Powers were abroad.

Through the night the growling continued, seeming to be mighty near unto us—aye! almost over our heads, and of a loudness far surpassing all that had come to us on the previous night; so that I thanked the Almighty that we had come into shelter in the midst of so much fear.

AT TIMES I fell upon sleep, as did most of the others; but, for the most part, I lay half sleeping and half waking—being unable to attain to true sleep by reason of the everlasting growling above us in the night, and the fear which it bred in me. Just after midnight I caught a sound in the main cabin beyond the door, and immediately I was fully awaked. I sat me up and listened, and became aware that something was fumbling about the deck of the main cabin. I got to my feet and made my way to where the bo'sun lay, meaning to waken him, if he slept. But he caught me by the ankle as I stooped to shake him, and whispered to me to keep silence; for he too had been aware of that strange noise of something fumbling beyond in the big cabin.

We crept both of us so close to the door as the chests would allow, and there we crouched, listening; but could not tell what manner of thing it might be which produced so strange a noise. It was neither shuffling, nor treading of any kind, nor yet was it the whirr of a bat's wings, the which had first occurred to me, knowing how vampires are said to inhabit the nights in dismal places. Nor yet was it the slurr of a snake; but rather it seemed to us to be as though a great wet cloth were being rubbed everywhere across the floor and bulkheads. We were the better able to be certain of the truth of this likeness, when, suddenly, it passed across the further side of the door behind which we listened. We drew backwards both of us in fright though the door, and the chests, stood between us and that which rubbed against it.

Presently, the sound ceased, and, listen as we might, we could no longer distinguish it. Yet, until the morning, we dozed no more; being troubled in mind as to what manner of thing it was which had made search in the big cabin.

Then, in time, the day came, and the growling ceased. For a mournful while the sad crying filled our ears, and then at last the eternal silence that fills the day hours of that dismal land fell upon us.

So, being at last in quietness, we slept,

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being greatly awearied. About seven in the morning, the bo'sun waked me, and I found that they had opened the door into the big cabin. But though the bo'sun and I made careful search, we could nowhere come upon anything to tell us aught concerning the thing which had put us so in fright. Yet, I know not if I am right in saying that we came upon nothing; for, in several places, the bulkheads had a *chafed* look; but whether this had been there before that night, we had no means of telling.

Of that which we had heard, the bo'sun bade me make no mention; for he would not have the men put more in fear than need be. This I conceived to be wisdom, and so held my peace. Yet I was much troubled in my mind to know what manner of thing it was which we had need to fear, and more—I desired greatly to know whether we should be free of it in the daylight hours. There was always with me, as I went hither and thither, the thought that IT—for that is how I designated it in my mind—might come upon us to our destruction.

After breakfast, at which we had each a portion of salt pork, besides rum and biscuit (for by now the fire in the caboose had been set going), we turned-to at various matters, under the directing of the bo'sun. Josh and two of the men made examination of the water casks, and the rest of us lifted the main hatch-covers, to make inspection of her cargo. But lo! we found nothing, save some three feet of water in her hold.

By this time Josh had drawn some water off from the casks, but it was most unsuitable for drinking, being vile of smell and taste. Yet the bo'sun bade him draw some into buckets, so that the air might haply purify it. But though this was done, and the water allowed to stand through the morning, it was but little better.

We were exercised in our minds as to the manner in which we should come upon suitable water, for by now we were beginning to be in need of it. One said one thing, and another said another, but no one had wit enough to call to mind any method by which our need should be satisfied.

When we had made an end of dining, the bo'sun sent Josh, with four of the men, up stream, perchance, after a mile or two, the water should prove of sufficient freshness to meet our purpose. They returned a little before sundown, having no water, for everywhere it was salt.

Foreseeing that it might be impossible to come upon water, the bo'sun had set the man whom he had ordained to be our cook to boiling the creek water in three great kettles. This he had ordered to be done soon after the boat left. Over the spout of each, he had hung a great pot of iron, filled with cold water from the hold—this being cooler than that from the creek—so that the steam from each kettle impinged upon the cold surface of iron pots. Being by this means condensed, it was caught in three buckets placed beneath them upon the floor of the caboose. In this way, enough water was collected to supply us for the evening and the following morning; yet it was but a slow method, and we had sore need of a speedier, were we to leave the hulk so soon as I, for one, desired.

We made our supper before sunset, so as to be free of the crying which we had reason to expect. After that, the bo'sun shut the scuttle, and we went every one of us into the captain's cabin. We barred the door, as on the previous night, and well was it for us that we acted with this prudence.

BY THE time that we had come into the captain's cabin and secured the door it was upon sunsetting, and as the dusk came on, so did the melancholy wailing pass over the land. Being by now somewhat inured to so much strangeness, we lit our pipes, and smoked; though I observed that none talked; for the crying without was not to be forgotten.

Our silence was broken by a discovery made by George, the young apprentice. This lad, being no smoker, was fain to do something to while away the time, and with this intent he had raked out the contents of a small box which had lain upon the deck at the side of the forrard bulkhead.

The box had appeared filled with odd small lumber, of which a part was a dozen or so grey paper wrappers, such as are used for carrying samples of corn. At first, George had tossed these aside; but, it growing darker, the bo'sun lit one of the candles which we had found in the lazarette. Thus, George, who was proceeding to tidy back the rubbish which was cumbering the place, discovered something which caused him to cry out to us his astonishment.

Upon hearing George call out, the bo'sun bade him keep silence, thinking it was but a piece of boyish restlessness.

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But George drew the candle to him, and bade us to listen; for the wrappers were covered with fine handwriting, after the fashion of a woman's.

Even as George told us of that which he had found, we became aware that the night was upon us; for, suddenly, the crying ceased, and in place thereof there came out of the far distance the low thunder of the night-growling that had tormented us through the past two nights. For a space we ceased to smoke, and sat—listening; for it was a very fearsome sound. In a very little while it seemed to surround the ship, as on the previous nights; but at length, using ourselves to it, we resumed our smoking, and bade George to read out to us from the writing upon the paper wrappers.

George, though shaking somewhat in his voice, began to decipher that which was upon the wrappers, and a strange and awesome story it was, and bearing much upon our own concerns:

"When they discovered the spring among the trees that crown the bank, there was much rejoicing; for we had come to have much need of water. And some, being in fear of the ship (declaring, because of all our misfortune and the strange disappearances of their messmates and the brother of my sweetheart, that she was haunted by a devil), declared their intention of taking their gear up to the spring, and there making a camp.

"This they conceived and carried out in the space of one afternoon; though our captain, a good and true man, begged of them, as they valued life, to stay within the shelter of their living-place. They would none of them hark to his counselling, and, because the mate and the bo'sun were gone, he had no means of compelling them to wisdom—"

At this point, George ceased to read, and began to rustle among the wrappers, as though in search for the continuation of the story.

Presently he cried out that he could not find it, and dismay was upon his face.

The bo'sun told him to read on from such sheets as were left; for, as he observed, we had no knowledge if more existed; and we were fain to know further of that spring which, from the story, appeared to be over the bank near to the vessel.

George, being thus abjured, picked up the topmost sheet; for they were, as I heard him explain to the bo'sun, all oddly numbered, and having but little reference one to the other. Yet we were mightily keen to know even so much as such odd scraps might tell unto us. Whereupon, George read from the next wrapper, which ran thus:

"Suddenly I heard the captain cry out that there was something in the main cabin, and immediately my fiancé's voice calling to me to lock my door, and on no condition to open it. Then the door of the captain's cabin slammed, and there came a silence, and the silence was broken by a *sound*. Now, this was the first time that I had heard the Thing make search through the big cabin; but, afterwards, my sweetheart told me it had happened aforetime, and they had told me naught, fearing to frighten me needlessly.

"Now I understood why my sweetheart had bidden me never to leave my stateroom door unbolted in the night-time. I remember also wondering if the noise of breaking glass that had waked me somewhat from my dreams a night or two previously had been the work of this indescribable Thing, for on the morning following that night, the glass in the skylight had been smashed. Thus it was that my thoughts wandered out to trifles, while yet my soul seemed ready to leap out from my bosom with fright.

"I had, by reason of usage, come to ability to sleep despite the fearsome growling; for I had conceived its cause to be the mutter of spirits in the night, and had not allowed myself to be unnecessarily frightened with doleful thoughts; for my fiancé had assured me of our safety, and that we should yet come to our home. And now, beyond my door, I could hear that fearsome sound of the Thing searching—"

GEORGE came to a sudden pause; for the bo'sun had risen and put a great hand upon his shoulder. The lad made to speak; but the bo'sun beckoned to him to say no word, and at that we, who had grown to nervousness through the happenings in the story, began every one to listen. We heard a sound which had escaped us in the noise of the growling without the vessel, and the interest of the reading.

We kept very silent, no man doing more than let the breath go in and out of his body, and each one of us knew that something moved without, in the big cabin. In a little, something touched upon our door, and it was, as I have mentioned earlier, as though a great swab rubbed and scrubbed

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The bo'sun began to strike at the tree with his cutlass, whereat it writhed and then began to wail . . .

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at the woodwork. The men nearest unto the door came backwards in a surge, being put in sudden fear by reason of the Thing being so near. But the bo'sun held up a hand, bidding them, in a low voice, to make no unneedful noise.

As though the sounds of their moving had been heard, the door was shaken with such violence that we waited, everyone, expecting to see it torn from its hinges. but it stood, and we hasted to brace it by means of the bunk boards, which we placed between it and the two great chests, and upon these we set a third chest, so that the door was quite hid.

I have no remembrance whether I have put down that when we came first to the ship we had found the stern window upon the larboard side to be shattered. But so it was, and the bo'sun had closed it by means of a teak-wood cover which was made to go over it in stormy weather, with stout battens across, which were set tight with wedges. This he had done upon the first night, having fear that some evil thing might come upon us through the opening, and very prudent was this same action of his, as shall be seen. For, suddenly, as we stood, every one having eyes for nothing but the doorway, we were shaken by a new fear as a noise came in our rear.

We turned with swiftness, thinking to find some dread thing upon us; but nothing was to be seen. Then George cried out that something was at the cover of the larboard window, and we stood back, growing ever more fearful because that some evil creature was so eager to come at us. The bo'sun, who was a very courageous man, and calm withal, walked over to the closed window, and saw to it that the battens were secure. For he had knowledge sufficient to be sure, if this were so, that no creature with strength less than that of a whale could break it down, and in such case its bulk would assure us from being molested.

Even as he made sure of the fastenings, there came a cry of fear from some of the men; for there had come at the glass of the unbroken window a reddish mass, which plunged up against it, sucking upon it, as it were. Josh, who was nearest to the table, caught up the candle, and held it towards the Thing; thus I saw that it had the appearance of a many-flapped thing, shaped, as it might be, out of raw beef—*but it was alive.*

We stared, everyone, being too bemused with terror to do aught to protect ourselves, even had we been possessed of weapons. And as we remained thus, an instant, like silly sheep awaiting the butcher, I heard the frame-work creak and crack, and there ran splits all across the glass. In another moment, the whole thing would have been torn away, and the cabin undefended, but that the bo'sun, with a great curse at us for our land-lubberly lack of use, seized the other cover, and clapped it over the window.

At that, there was more help than could be made to avail, and the battens and wedges were in place in a trice. That this was no sooner accomplished than need be, we had immediate proof. There came a rending of wood and a splintering of glass, and after that a strange yowling out in the dark, and the yowling rose above and drowned the continuous growling that filled the night. In a little, it died away, and in the brief silence that ensued we heard a slobby fumbling at the teak cover. But it was well secured, and we had no immediate cause for fear.

CHAPTER II

THE TWO FACES

OF THE reminder of that night, I have but a confused memory. At times we heard the door shaken behind the great chests; but no harm came to it. And, odd whiles, there was a soft thudding and rubbing upon the decks over our heads, and once, as I recollect, the Thing made a final try at the teak covers across the windows.

The day came at last, and found me sleeping. Indeed, we had slept beyond the noon; but that the bo'sun, mindful of our needs, waked us, and we removed the chests. None durst open the door, until the bo'sun bid us stand to one side. We faced about at him then, and saw that he held a great cutlass in his right hand.

He called to us that there were four more of the weapons, and made a backward motion with his left hand towards an open locker. We made some haste to the place to which he pointed, and found that, among some other gear, there were three more weapons such as he held. The fourth was a straight cut-and-thrust, and this I had the good fortune to secure.

Being now armed, we ran to join the bo'sun; for by this time he had the door open, and was scanning the main cabin. I would remark here how a good weapon doth seem to put heart into a man; for I,

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who but a few short hours since had feared for my life, was now right full of lustiness and fight; which, mayhap, was no matter for regret.

From the main cabin, the bo'sun led up on to the deck, and I remember some surprise at finding the lid of the scuttle even as we had left it the previous night. But then I recollected that the skylight was broken, and there was access to the big cabin that way. I questioned within myself as to what manner of thing it could be which ignored the convenience of the scuttle, and descended by way of the broken skylight.

We made a search of the decks, and fo'cas'le; but found nothing, and, after that, the bo'sun stationed two of us on guard, whilst the rest went about such duties as were needful. In a little, we came to breakfast, and, after that, we prepared to test the story upon the sample wrappers, and see perchance whether there was indeed a spring of fresh water among the trees.

Between the vessel and the trees lay a slope of the thick mud against which the vessel rested. To have scrambled up this bank had been next to impossible by reason of its fat richness. Indeed, it looked fit to crawl. But Josh called out to the bo'sun that he had come upon a ladder lashed across the fo'cas'le head. This was brought, also several hatch covers. The latter were placed first upon the mud, and the ladder laid upon them; by which means we were enabled to pass up to the top of the bank without contact with the mud.

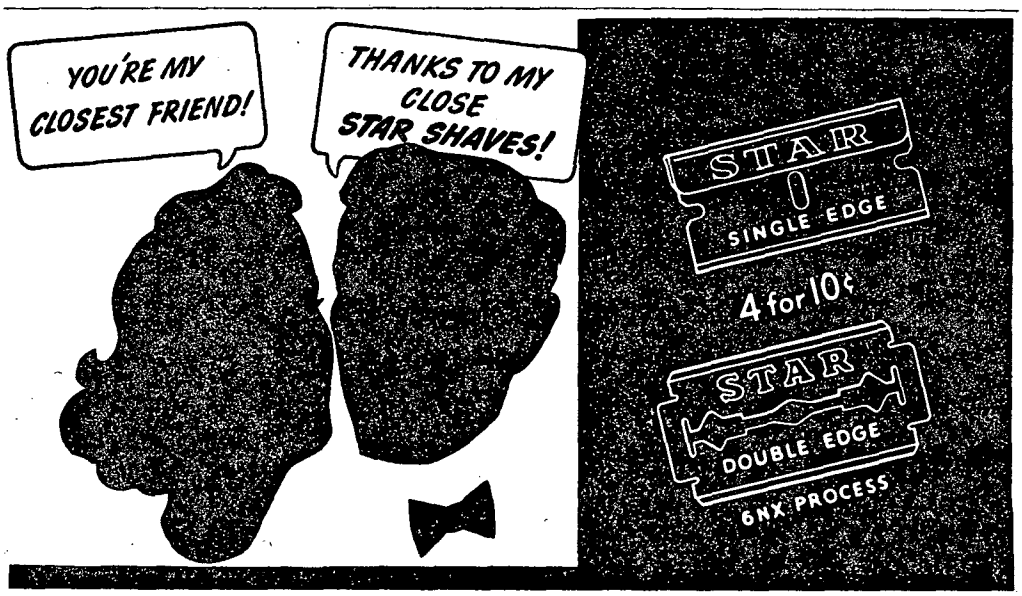
Here, we entered at once among the trees; for they grew right up to the edge. We had no trouble in making a way; for they were nowhere close together; but standing, rather, each one in a little open space by itself.

We had gone a little way among the trees, when, suddenly, one who was with us cried out that he could see something away on our right, and we clutched everyone his weapon the more determinedly, and went towards it. It proved to be but a seaman's chest, and a space further off, we discovered another.

After a little walking, we found the camp; but there was small semblance of a camp about it; for the sail of which the tent had been formed was all torn and stained and lay muddy upon the ground. The spring, however, was all we had wished, clear and sweet, and so we knew we might dream of deliverance.

Upon our discovery of the spring, it might be thought that we should set up a shout to those upon the vessel. But this was not so; for there was something in the air of the place which cast a gloom upon our spirits, and we had no disinclination to return unto the vessel.

Upon coming to the brig, the bo'sun called to four of the men to go down into the boats, and pass up the breakers. Also, he collected all the buckets belonging to the brig, and forthwith each of us was set to our work. Some, those with the weap-



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ons, entered into the wood, and gave down the water to those stationed upon the bank, and these, in turn, passed it to those in the vessel. To the man in the galley, the bo'sun gave command to fill a boiler with some of the most select pieces of the pork and beef from the casks, and get them cooked so soon as might be. And so we were kept at it, for it had been determinded—now that we had come upon water—that we should stay not an hour longer in that monster-ridden craft. And we were all agog to get the boats revictualled and put back to the sea, from which we had too gladly escaped.

WE WORKED through all that remained of the morning, and right on into the afternoon; for we were in mortal fear of the coming dark. Towards four o'clock, the bo'sun sent the man who had been set to do our cooking up to us with slices of salt meat upon biscuits, and we ate as we worked, washing our throats with water from the spring. Before the evening, we had filled our breakers, and near every vessel which was convenient for us to take in the boats. More, some of us snatched the chance to wash our bodies; for we were sore with brine, having dipped in the sea to keep down thirst as much as might be.

When the bo'sun sent word that we should come aboard, and bring our gear, we made all haste. Thus, as it chanced, I found that I had left my sword beside the spring, having placed it there to have two hands for the carrying of one of the breakers. At my remarking my loss, George, who stood near, cried out that he would run for it, and was gone in a moment, being greatly curious to see the spring.

At this moment the bo'sun came up and called for George, but I informed him that he had run to the spring to bring me my sword. The bo'sun stamped his foot and swore a great oath, declaring that he had kept the lad by him all the day; having a wish to keep him from any danger which the wood might hold, and knowing the lad's desire to adventure there.

I reproached myself for so gross a piece of stupidity, and hastened after the bo'sun, who had disappeared over the top of the bank. I saw his back as he passed into the wood, and ran until I was up with him. For quite suddenly, I discovered that a sense of chilly dampness had come among the trees; though a while before the place had been full of the warmth of the sun. This, I put to the account of evening, which was drawing on apace; and also, it must be borne in mind, that there were but the two of us.

We came to the spring; but George was not to be seen, and I saw no sign of my sword. The bo'sun raised his voice, and cried out the lad's name. Once he called, and again; then at the second shout we heard the boy's shrill halloo, from some distance ahead among the trees. We ran towards the sound, plunging heavily across the ground, which was everywhere covered with a thick scum that clogged the feet in walking. As we ran we hallooed, and so came upon the boy, and I saw that he had my sword.

The bo'sun ran towards him, and caught him by the arm, speaking with anger, and commanding him to return with us immediately to the vessel.

The lad, for reply, pointed with my sword, and we saw that he pointed at what appeared to be a bird against the trunk of one of the trees. This, as I moved closer, I perceived to be a part of the tree, and no bird. But it had a very wondrous likeness to a bird; so much so that I went up to it, to see if my eyes had deceived me. It seemed no more than a freak of nature, though most wondrous in its fidelity; being but an excrescence upon the trunk.

With a sudden thought that it would make me a curio, I reached up to see whether I could break it away from the tree; but it was above my reach, so that I had to leave it. Yet, one thing I discovered; for, in stretching towards the protuberance, I had placed a hand upon the tree, and its trunk was soft as plup under my fingers, much after the fashion of a mushroom.

As we turned to go, the bo'sun inquired of George his reason for going beyond the spring. George told him that he had seemed to hear some one calling to him among the trees, and there had been so much pain in the voice that he had run towards it; but been unable to discover the owner. Immediately afterwards he had seen the curious bird-like excrescence upon a tree near by.

WE HAD come nigh to the spring on our return journey, when a sudden low whine seemed to run among the trees. I glanced towards the sky, and realized that the evening was upon us. I was about to remark upon this to the bo'sun, when, abruptly, he came to a stand, and

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bent forward to stare into the shadows to our right. George and I turned ourselves about to perceive what matter it was which had attracted the attention of the bo'sun; thus we made out a tree some twenty yards away, which had all its branches wrapped about its trunk, much as the lash of a whip is wound about its stock. This seemed to us a very strange sight, and we made all of us towards it to learn the reason of so extraordinary a happening.

When we had come close upon it, we had no means of arriving at a knowledge of that which it portended; but walked each of us around the tree, and were more astonished, after our circumnavigation of the great vegetable, than before.

Suddenly, and in the distance, I caught the far wailing that came before the night, and abruptly, as it seemed to me, the tree wailed at us. I was vastly astonished and frightened; yet, though I retreated, I could not withdraw my gaze from the tree; but scanned it the more intently; and, suddenly, I saw a brown, human face peering at us from between the wrapped branches. I stood very still, being seized with that fear which renders one shortly incapable of movement. Then, before I had possession of myself, I saw that it was of a part with the trunk of the tree; for I could not tell where it ended and the tree began.

I caught the bo'sun by the arm, and pointed; for whether it was a part of the tree or not, it was a work of the devil. The bo'sun, on seeing it, ran straightway so close to the tree that he might have touched it with his hand, and I found myself beside him.

George, who was on the bo'sun's other side, whispered that there was another face, not unlike to a woman's, and, indeed, so soon as I perceived it, I saw that the tree had a second excrescence, most strangely after the face of a woman. The bo'sun cried out, with an oath, at the strangeness of the thing, and I felt the arm, which I held, shake somewhat, as it might be with a deep emotion.

Far away I heard again the sound of the wailing, and, immediately, from among the trees about us, there came answering wails and a great sighing. And before I had time to be more than aware of these things, the tree wailed again at us.

The bo'sun cried out suddenly that he *knew* though of what it was that he knew, I had at that time no knowledge. Immediately he began with his cutlass to strike at the tree before us, and to cry upon God to blast it; and lo! at his smiting a very fearsome thing happened; for the tree did bleed like any live creature. A great yowling came from it, and it began to writhe, and, suddenly, I became aware that all about us the trees were a-quiver.

George cried out, and ran round upon my side of the bo'sun, and I saw that one of the great cabbage-like things pursued him upon its stem, even as an evil serpent; and very dreadful it was, for it had become blood red in colour. I smote it with the sword, which I had taken from the lad, and it fell to the ground.

Now from the brig I heard them hallooing, and the trees had become like live things, and there was a vast growling in the air, and hideous trumpetings. I caught the bo'sun again by the arm, and shouted to him that we must run for our lives. And this we did, smiting with our swords as we ran; for there came things at us, out from the growing dusk.

We made the brig, and, the boats being ready, I scrambled after the bo'sun into his, and we put straightway into the creek, all of us, pulling with so much haste as our loads would allow. As we went, I looked back at the brig, and it seemed to me that a multitude of things hung over the bank above her, and there seemed a flicker of things moving hither and thither aboard of her. And then we were in the great creek up which we had come, and, in a little, it was night.

All that night we rowed, keeping very strictly to the centre of the big creek. And all about us bellowed the vast growling, being more fearsome than ever I had heard it, until it seemed to me that we had waked all that land of terror to a knowledge of our presence. But, when the morning came, so good a speed had we made, what with our fear, and the current being with us, that we were nigh upon the open sea; whereat each one of us raised a shout, feeling like freed prisoners.

Full of thankfulness to the Almighty, we rowed outward to the sea.

FOR a day and a night we stood out from the land towards the north, having a steady breeze to which we set our lug sails, and made very good way, the sea being quiet, though with a slow, lumbering swell from the southward.

It was on the morning of the second day of our escape that we met with the beginnings of our adventure into the Silent Sea, the which I am about to describe.

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The night had been quiet, and the breeze steady until near on to the dawn, when the wind slacked away to nothing, and we lay there waiting, perchance the sun should bring the breeze with it. And this it did; but no such wind as we did desire; for when the morning came upon us, we discovered all that part of the sky to be full of a fiery redness, which presently spread away down to the south, so that an entire quarter of the heavens was, as it seemed to us, a mighty arc of blood-coloured fire.

At the sight of these omens, the bo'sun gave orders to prepare the boats for the storm which we had reason to expect, looking for it in the south, for it was from that direction that the swell came rolling upon us. With this intent, we roused out so much heavy canvas as the boats contained, for we had gotten a bolt and a half from the hulk in the creek; also the boat covers which we could lash down to the brass studs under the gunnels of the boats. In each boat we mounted the whaleback—which had been stowed along the tops of the thwarts—also its supports, lashing the same to the thwarts below the knees.

We laid two lengths of the stout canvas the full length of the boat over the whaleback, overlapping and nailing them to the same, so that they sloped away down over the gunnels upon each side as though they had formed a roof to us. Here, whilst some stretched the canvas, nailing its lower edges to the gunnel, others were employed in lashing together the oars and the mast. To this bundle they secured a considerable length of new three-and-a-half-inch hemp rope, which we had brought away from the hulk along with the canvas. This rope was then passed over the bows and in through the painter ring, and thence to the forrard thwarts, where it was made fast, and we gave attention to parcel it with odd strips of canvas against danger of chafe. The same was done in both of the boats, for we could not put our trust in the painters, besides which they had not sufficient length to secure safe and easy riding.

By this time we had the canvas nailed down to the gunnel around our boat, after which we spread the boat-cover over it, lacing it down to the brass studs beneath the gunnel. And so we had all the boat covered in, save a place in the stern where a man might stand to wield the steering oar, for the boats were double bowed. In each boat we made the same preparation, lashing all moveable articles, and preparing to meet so great a storm as might well fill the heart with terror. For the sky cried out to us that it would be no light wind, and further, the great swell from the south grew more huge with every hour that passed; though as yet it was without virulence, being slow and oily and black against the redness of the sky.

Presently we were ready, and had cast over the bundle of oars and the mast, which was to serve as our sea-anchor, and we lay waiting. It was at this time that the bo'sun called over to Josh certain advice with regard to that which lay before us.

And after that the two of them sculled the boats a little apart; for there might be a danger of their being dashed together by the first violence of the storm.

There came a time of waiting, with Josh and the bo'sun each of them at the steering oars, and the rest of us stowed away under the coverings. From where I crouched near the bo'sun, I had sight of Josh away upon our port side. He was standing up black as a shape of night against the mighty redness, when the boat came to the foamless crowns of the swells, and then was gone from sight in the hollows between.

MIDDAY had come and gone, and we had made shift to eat so good a meal as our appetites would allow. We had no knowledge how long it might be ere we should have chance of another, if, indeed, we had ever need to think more of such. And then, in the middle part of the afternoon, we heard the first cryings of the storm—a far-distant moaning, rising and falling most solemnly.

Soon all the southern part of the horizon so high up, maybe, as some seven to ten degrees, was blotted out by a great black wall of cloud, over which the red glare came down upon the great swells as though from the light of some vast and unseen fire. It was about this time I observed that the sun had the appearance of a great full moon, being pale and clearly defined, and seeming to have no warmth nor brilliancy. And this, as may be imagined, seemed most strange to us, the more so because of the redness in the south and east.

All this while the swells increased most prodigiously; though without making broken water. Yet they informed us that we had done well to take so much precaution, for surely they were raised by a

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very great storm. A little before evening, the moaning came again, and then a space of silence; after which there rose a very sudden bellowing, as of wild beasts, and then once more the silence.

The bo'sun making no objection, I raised my head above the cover until I was in a standing position; for, until now, I had taken no more than occasional peeps; and I was very glad of the chance to stretch my limbs; for I had grown mightily cramped. Having stirred the sluggishness of my blood, I sat me down again; but in such position that I could see every part of the horizon without difficulty. Ahead of us, that is to the south, I saw now that the great wall of cloud had risen some further degrees, and there was something less of the redness. What there was left of it, though, was sufficiently terrifying, for it appeared to crest the black cloud like red foam, seeming as though a mighty sea made ready to break over the world.

Towards the west the sun was sinking behind a curious red-tinted haze, which gave it the appearance of a dull red disk. To the north, seeming very high in the sky, were some flecks of cloud lying motionless, and of a very pretty rose colour. And here I may remark that all the sea to the north of us appeared as a very ocean of dull red fire; though, as might be expected, the swells, coming up from the south, against the light were so many exceeding great hills of blackness.

It was just after I had made these observations that we heard again the distant roaring of the storm, and I know not how to convey the exceeding terror of that sound. It was as though some mighty beast growled far down towards the south; and it seemed to make very clear to me that we were but two small craft in a very lonesome place.

Even while the roaring lasted, I saw a sudden light flare up, as it were from the edge of the southern horizon. It had somewhat the appearance of lightning; yet vanished not immediately, as is the wont of lightning. And more, it had not been my experience to witness such, spring up from out of the sea, but, rather, down from the heavens. I have little doubt but that it was a form of lightning; for it came many times after this, so that I had chance to observe it minutely. Frequently, as I watched, the storm would shout at us in a most fearsome manner.

When the sun was low upon the horizon, there came to our ears a very shrill, screaming noise, most penetrating and distressing. Immediately afterwards, the bo'sun shouted out something in a hoarse voice, and commenced to sway furiously upon the steering oar. I saw his stare fixed upon a point a little on our larboard bow, and perceived that in that direction the sea was all blown up into vast clouds of dust-like froth, and I knew that the storm was upon us. Immediately afterwards a cold blast struck us; but we suffered no harm, for the bo'sun had gotten the boat bows-on by this. The wind passed us, and there was an instant of calm. All the air above us was full of a continuous roaring, so very loud and intense that I was like to be deafened. To windward, I perceived an enormous wall of spray bearing down upon us, and I heard again the shrill screaming, pierce through the roaring. Then the bo'sun whipped in his oar under the cover, and, reaching forward, drew the canvas aft, so that it covered the entire boat, and he held it down against the gunnel upon the starboard side, shouting in my ear to do likewise upon the larboard.

Had it not been for this forethought on the part of the bo'sun, we had been all dead men; and this may be the better believed when I explain that we felt the water falling upon the stout canvas overhead, tons and tons; though so beaten to froth as to lack solidity to sink or crush us. I have said "felt"; for I would made it clear that so intense was the roaring and screaming of the elements, there could no sound have penetrated to us, no! not the pealing of mighty thunders.

For the space of maybe a full minute the boat quivered and shook most vilely, so that she seemed like to have been shaken in pieces, and from a dozen places between the gunnel and the covering canvas, the water spurted in upon us. The boat had ceased now to rise and fall upon the great swell, and whether this was because the sea was flattened by the first rush of the wind, or that the excess of the storm held her steady, I am unable to tell.

IN A little while, the first fury of the blast being spent, the boat began to sway from side to side, as though the wind blew now upon the one beam, and now upon the other. Several times we were stricken heavily with the blows of solid water. But presently this ceased, and we returned once again to the rise and fall of the swell, only that now we re-

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ceived a cruel jerk every time that the boat came upon the top of a sea.

Towards midnight there came some mighty flames of lightning, so bright that they lit up the boat through the double covering of canvas. Yet no man of us heard aught of the thunder; for the roaring of the storm made all else a silence.

And so to the dawn, after which, finding that we were still, by the mercy of God, possessed of our lives, we made shift to eat and drink; after which we slept.

Being extremely wearied by the stress of the past night, I slumbered through many hours of the storm, waking at some time between noon and evening. Overhead, as I lay looking upwards, the canvas showed of a dull leadenish colour, blackened completely at whiles by the dash of spray and water. And so, presently, having eaten again, and feeling that all things lay in the hands of the Almighty, I came once more upon sleep.

Twice through the following night was I wakened by the boat being hurled upon her beam-ends by the blows of the seas. But she righted easily, and took scarce any water, the canvas proving a very roof of safety. And so the morning came again.

Being now rested, I crawled aft to where the bo'sun lay, and, the noise of the storm lulling odd instants, shouted in his ear to know whether the wind was easing at whiles. To this he nodded, whereat I felt a most joyful sense of hope pulse through me, and ate such food as could be gotten, with a very good relish.

In the afternoon, the sun broke out suddenly, lighting up the boat most gloomily through the wet canvas; yet a very welcome light it was, and bred in us a hope that the storm was near to breaking. In a little, the sun disappeared; but, presently, it coming again, the bo'sun beckoned to me to assist him. We removed such temporary nails as we had used to fasten down the after part of the canvas, and pushed back the covering a space sufficient to allow our heads to go through into the daylight. On looking out, I discovered the air to be full of spray, beaten as fine as dust, and then, before I could note aught else, a little gout of water took me in the face with such force as to deprive me of breath; so that I had to descend beneath the canvas for a little while.

So soon as I was recovered, I thrust forth my head again, and now I had some sight of the terrors around us. As each huge sea came towards us, the boat shot up to meet it, right up to its very crest, and there, for the space of some instants, we would seem to be swamped in a very ocean of foam, boiling up on each side of the boat to the height of many feet. Then, the sea passing from under us, we would go swooping dizzily down the great, black, froth-splotched back of the wave, until the oncoming sea caught us up most mightily.

Odd whiles, the crest of a sea would hurl forward before we had reached the top, and though the boat shot upward like a veritable feather, yet the water would swirl right over us.

Apart from the way in which the boat met the seas, there was a very sense of terror in the air. The continuous roaring and howling of the storm; the *screaming* of the foam, as the frothy summits of the briny mountains hurled past us, and the wind that tore the breath out of our weak human throats, are things scarce to be conceived.

Soon we drew in our heads, the sun having vanished again, and nailed down the canvas once more, and prepared for the night.

From here on until the morning, I have very little knowledge of any happenings; for I slept much of the time, and, for the rest, there was little to know, cooped up beneath the cover. Nothing save the interminable, thundering swoop of the boat downwards, and then the halt and upward hurl, and the occasional plunges and surges to larboard or starboard.

I would make mention here, how that I had little thought all this while for the peril of the other boat, and, indeed, I was so very full of our own that it is no matter at which to wonder. However, as it proved, and as this is a most suitable place in which to tell of it, the boat that held Josh and the rest of the crew came through the storm with safety. But it was not until many years afterwards that I had the good fortune to hear from Josh himself how that, after the storm, they were picked up by a homeward-bound vessel, and landed in the Port of London.

And now, to our own happenings.

CHAPTER III

THE WEED-CHOKED SEA

IT WAS some little while before midday that we grew conscious that the sea had become very much less violent; and this despite the wind roaring

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with scarce abated noise. Soon everything about the boat, saving the wind, having grown indubitably calmer, and no great water breaking over the canvas, the bo'sun beckoned me again to assist him lift the after part of the cover. This we did, and put forth our heads to inquire the reason of the unexpected quietness of the sea; not knowing but that we had come suddenly under the lee of some unknown land. For a space, we could see nothing, beyond the surrounding billows; for the sea was still very furious, though no matter to cause us concern, after that through which we had come.

Presently, however, the bo'sun, raising himself, saw something, and, bending, cried in my ear that there was a low bank which broke the force of the sea; but he was full of wonder to know how that we had passed it without shipwreck. And whilst he was still pondering the matter, I raised myself, and took a look on all sides of us. I discovered that there lay another great bank upon our larboard side, and this I pointed out to him. Immediately afterwards, we came upon a great mass of seaweed swung up on the crest of a sea, and, soon, another.

We drifted on, and the seas grew less with astonishing rapidity, so that, in a little, we stript off the cover so far as the midship thwart; for the rest of the men were sorely in need of the fresh air, after so long a time below the canvas covering.

It was after we had eaten that one of them made out that there was another low bank astern upon which we were drifting. The bo'sun stood up and made an examination of it, being much exercised in his mind to know how we might come clear of it with safety. After a while we had come very near to it and we discovered it to be composed of seaweed, and we let the boat drive upon it, making no doubt but that the other banks which we had seen were of a similar nature to this one.

In a little, we had driven in among the weed. Though our speed was greatly slowed, we made some progress, and in time came out upon the other side. We found the sea to be near quiet, so that we hauled in our sea anchor—which had collected a great mass of weed about it—and removed the whaleback and canvas coverings.

After this we stepped the mast and set a tiny stormforesail upon the boat, for we wished to have her under control, and could set no more than this, because of the violence of the breeze.

Thus we drove on before the wind, the bo'sun steering, and avoiding all such banks as showed ahead, and ever the sea grew calmer. When it was near on to evening, we discovered a huge stretch of the weed that seemed to block all the sea ahead, and, at that, we hauled down the foresail and took to our oars and began to pull, broadside on to it, towards the west.

So strong was the breeze now that we were being driven down rapidly upon it. Just before sunset we opened out the end of it and drew in our oars, very thankful to set the little foresail and run off again before the wind.

When the night came down upon us the bo'sun made us take turn and turn about to keep a look-out, for the boat was going some knots through the water, and we were among strange seas. But *he* took no sleep all that night, keeping always to the steering oar.

I have memory, during my time of watching, of passing odd floating masses, which I make no doubt were weed, and once we drove right atop of one; but drew clear without much trouble. And all the while, through the dark to starboard, I could make out the dim outline of that enormous weed extent lying low upon the sea, and seeming without end. And so, presently, my time to watch being at an end, I returned to my slumber, and when next I waked it was morning.

The morning discovered to me that there was no end to the weed upon our starboard side; for it stretched away into the distance ahead of us so far as we could see; while all about us the sea was full of floating masses of the stuff. And then, suddenly, one of the men cried out that there was a vessel in among the weed. We were very greatly excited, and stood upon the thwarts that we might get better view of her.

I saw her now a great way in from the edge of the weed, and I noted that her foremast was gone near to the deck, and she had no main topmast; though, strangely enough, her mizzen stood unharmed.

Beyond this, I could make out but little, because of the distance; though the sun, which was upon our larboard side, gave me some sight of her hull, but not much, because of the weed in which she was deeply embedded. It seemed to me that her sides were very weatherworn, and in

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one place some glistening brown object, which may have been a fungus, caught the rays of the sun, sending off a wet sheen.

We stood, all of us, upon the thwarts, staring and exchanging opinions, and were like to have overset the boat; but the bo'sun ordered us down. And after this we made our breakfast, and had much discussion regarding the stranger, as we ate.

LATER, towards midday, we were able to set our mizzen; for the storm had greatly modified, and we hauled away to the west, to escape a great bank of the weed which ran out from the main body. Upon rounding this, we let the boat off again, and set the main lug, and thus made very good speed before the wind. Yet though we ran all that afternoon parallel with the weed to starboard, we came not to its end. And three separate times we saw the hulks of rotting vessels, some of them having the appearance of a previous age, so ancient did they seem.

Towards evening the wind dropped to a very little breeze, so that we made but slow way, and we had better chance to study the weed. We saw that it was full of crabs; though for the most part so very minute as to escape the casual glance; yet they were not all small for in a while I discovered a swaying among the weed, a little way in from the edge, and immediately I saw the mandible of a very great crab stir amid the weed. Hoping to obtain it for food, I pointed it out to the bo'sun, suggesting that we should try and capture it.

There being now scarce any wind, he bade us get out a couple of the oars, and back the boat up to the weed. This we did, after which he made fast a piece of salt meat to a bit of spun yarn, and bent this on to the boat-hook. Then he made a running bowline, and slipped the loop on to the shaft of the boat-hook, after which he held out the boat-hook, after the fashion of a fishing-rod, over the place where I had seen the crab. Almost immediately, there swept up an enormous claw, and grasped the meat, and the bo'sun cried out to me to take an oar and slide the bowline along the boat-hook, so that it should fall over the claw. This I did, and immediately some of us hauled upon the line, taughtening it about the great claw.

The bo'sun sung out to us to haul the crab aboard, that we had it most securely. Yet on the instant we had reason to wish that we had been less successful; for the creature, feeling the tug of our pull upon it, tossed the weed in all directions, and thus we had full sight of it, and discovered it to be so great a crab as is scarce conceivable—a very monster. And further, it was apparent to us that the brute had no fear of us, nor intention to escape; but rather made to come at us. The bo'sun, perceiving our danger, cut the line, and bade us put weight upon the oars, and so in a moment we were in safety, and very determined to have no more meddlings with such creatures.

Presently, the night came upon us, and, the wind, remaining low, there was everywhere about us a great stillness, most solemn after the continuous roaring of the storm which had beset us in the previous days. Yet now and again a little wind would rise and blow across the sea, and where it met the weed, there would come a low, damp rustling, so that I could hear the passage of it for no little time after the calm had come once more all about us.

It is a strange thing that I, who had slept amid the noise of the past days, should find sleeplessness amid so much calm; yet so it was. After a while I took the steering oar, proposing that the rest should sleep, and to this the bo'sun agreed, first warning me, however, most particularly to have care that I kept the boat off the weed (for we had still a little way on us). And, further, he said to call him should anything unforeseen occur. After that, almost immediately, he fell asleep, as indeed did the most of the men.

From the time that I relieved the bo'sun, until midnight, I sat upon the gunnel of the boat, with the steering oar under my arm, and watched and listened, most full of a sense of the strangeness of the seas into which we had come. It is true that I had heard tell of seas choked up with weed—seas that were full of stagnation, having no tides; but I had not thought to come upon such an one in my wanderings. I had indeed set down such tales as being bred of imagination and without reality in fact.

A little before the dawn, and when the sea was yet full of darkness, I was greatly startled to hear a prodigious splash amid the weed, mayhaps at a distance of some hundred yards from the boat. As I stood full of alertness, and knowing not what the next moment might bring forth, there came to me across the immense waste of weed a long, mournful cry, and then again the silence.

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Though I kept very quiet, there came no further sound, and I was about to reseat myself, when, afar off in that strange wilderness, there flashed out a sudden flame of fire.

Upon seeing fire in the midst of so much lonesomeness, I was as one mazed.

My judgment returning to me, I stooped and waked the bo'sun; for it seemed to me that this was a matter for his attention. He, after staring at it awhile, declared that he could see the shape of a vessel's hull beyond the flame; but, immediately, he was in doubt, as, indeed, I had been all the while. Even as we peered, the light vanished, and though we waited for the space of some minutes, watching steadfastly, there came no further sight of that strange illumination.

FROM now until the dawn, the bo'sun remained awake with me, and we talked much upon that which we had seen; yet could come to no satisfactory conclusion; for it seemed impossible to us that a place of so much desolation could contain any living being. Just as the dawn was upon us there loomed up a fresh wonder—the hull of a great vessel maybe a couple or three score fathoms in from the edge of the weed. The wind was still very light, being no more than an occasional breath, so that we went past her at a drift; thus the dawn had strengthened sufficiently to give to us a clear sight of the stranger, before we had gone more than a little past her. I perceived that now she lay full broadside on to us, and that her three masts were gone close down to the deck. Her side was streaked in places with rust, and in others a green scum overspread her. But it was no more than a glance that I gave at any of these matters; for I had spied something which drew all my attention—great leathery arms splayed all across her side, some of them crooked in-board over the rail. And then, low down, seen just above the weed, the huge, brown, glistening bulk of so great a monster as ever I had conceived.

The bo'sun saw this in the same instant and cried out in a hoarse whisper that it was a mighty devil-fish, and even as he spoke two of the arms flickered up into the cold light of the dawn, as though the creature had been asleep and we had waked it. The bo'sun seized an oar, and I did likewise, and, so swiftly as we dared, for fear of making an unneedful noise, we pulled the boat to a safer distance. From there, and until the vessel had become indistinct by reason of the space we put between us, we watched that great creature clutched to the old hull, as it might be a limpet to a rock.

When it was broad day, some of the men began to rouse up, and in a little we broke our fast, which was not displeasing to me, who had spent the night watching. And so through the day we sailed with a very light wind upon our larboard quarter. And all the while we kept the great waste of weed upon our starboard side. And apart from the mainland of the weed, as it were, there were scattered about an uncountable number of weed islets and banks, and there were thin patches of it that appeared scarce above the water. Through these latter we let the boat sail; for they had not sufficient density to impede our progress more than a little.

When the day was far spent we came in sight of another wreck amid the weed. She lay in from the edge perhaps so much as the half of a mile, and she had all three of her lower masts in, and her lower yards squared. But what took our eyes more than aught else was a great superstructure which had been built upward from her rails, almost half-way to her main tops. This, as we were able to perceive, was supported by ropes let down from the yards; but of what material the superstructure was composed, I have no knowledge. It was so over-grown with some form of green stuff—as was so much of the hull as showed above the weed—as to defy our guesses.

Because of this growth, it was borne upon us that the ship must have been lost to the world a very great age ago. At this suggestion, I grew full of solemn thoughts; for it seemed to me that we had come upon the cemetery of the oceans.

In a little while after we had passed this ancient craft, the night came down upon us, and we prepared for sleep. And because the boat was making some little way through the water, the bo'sun gave out that each of us should stand our turn at the steering-oar, and that he was to be called should any fresh matter transpire. We settled down for the night, and owing to my previous sleeplessness, I was full weary, so that I knew nothing until the one whom I was to relieve shook me into wakefulness. When I was fully waked, I perceived that a low moon hung above the horizon, and shed a very ghostly light across the great weed world to starboard. For the rest, the night was exceedingly

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quiet, so that no sound came to me in all that ocean, save the rippling of the water upon our bends as the boat forged slowly along.

I settled down to pass the time ere I should be allowed again to sleep. But first I asked the man whom I had relieved how long a time had passed since moon-rise; to which he replied that it was no more than the half of an hour. I questioned whether he had seen aught strange amid the weed during his time at the oar. But he had seen nothing, except that once he had fancied a light had shown in the midst of the waste; yet it could have been naught save a humor of the imagination. Apart from this, he had heard a strange crying a little after midnight, and twice there had been great splashes among the weed. After that he fell asleep, being impatient at my questioning.

It so chanced that my watch had come just before the dawn; for which I was full of thankfulness, being in that frame of mind when the dark breeds strange and unwholesome fancies. Yet, though I was so near to the dawn, I was not to escape free of the dree influence of that place. For, as I sat, running my gaze to and fro over its grey immensity, it came to me that there were strange movements among the weed, and I seemed to see vaguely, as one may see things in dreams, dim white faces peer out at me here and there. My commonsense assured me that I was but deceived by the uncertain light and the sleep in my eyes; yet for all that, it put my nerves on the quiver.

A little later there came to my ears the noise of a very great splash amid the weed; but though I stared with intentness, I could nowhere discern aught as likely to be the cause thereof. And then, suddenly, between me and the moon, there drove up from out of that great waste a vast bulk, flinging huge masses of weed in all directions. It seemed to be no more than a hundred fathoms distant, and, against the moon, I saw the outline of it most clearly —a mighty devil-fish. Then it had fallen back once more with a prodigious splash, and so the quiet fell again, finding me sore afraid, and no little bewildered that so monstrous a creature could leap with such agility.

And then (in my fright I had let the boat come near to the edge of the weed) there came a subtle stir opposite to our starboard bow, and something slid down into the water. I swayed upon the oar to turn the boat's head outward, and with the same movement leant forward and sideways to peer, bringing my face near to the boat's rail. In the same instant, I found myself looking down into a white demoniac face, human save that the mouth and nose had greatly the appearance of a beak. The thing was gripping at the side of the boat with two flickering hands—gripping the bare, smooth outer surface, in a way that woke in my mind a sudden memory of the great devil-fish which had clung to the side of the wreck we had passed in the previous dawn.

I saw the face come up towards me, and one misshapen hand fluttered almost to my throat, and there came a sudden, hateful reek in my nostrils—foul and abominable. Suddenly I came into possession of my faculties, and drew back with great haste and a wild cry of fear. I grasped the steering-oar by the middle, and was smiting downward with the loom over the side of the boat; thus the thing was gone from my sight.

I remember shouting out to the bo'sun and to the men to awake, and then the bo'sun had me by the shoulder, and was calling in my ear to know what dire thing had come about. I cried out that I did not know, and, being somewhat calmer, I told them of the thing that I had seen. But even as I told of it, there seemed to be no truth in it, so that they were all at a loss to know whether I had fallen asleep, or that I had indeed seen a devil.

And presently the dawn was upon us.

IT WAS as we were all discussing the matter of the devil face that had peered up at me out of the water, that Job, the ordinary seaman, discovered the island in the light of the growing dawn. He sprang to his feet with so loud a cry that we thought he had seen a second demon. Yet when we made discovery of that which he had already perceived, we checked our blame at his sudden shout; for the sight of land, after so much desolation, made us very warm in our hearts.

At first the island seemed but a very small matter; for we did not know at that time that we viewed it from its end. Yet despite this, we took to our oars and rowed with all haste towards it, and so, coming nearer, were able to see that it had a greater size than we had imagined. Having cleared the end of it, and keeping to that side which was further from the great mass of the weed-continent, we opened out a bay that curved inward to a sandy beach, seductive to our tired eyes.

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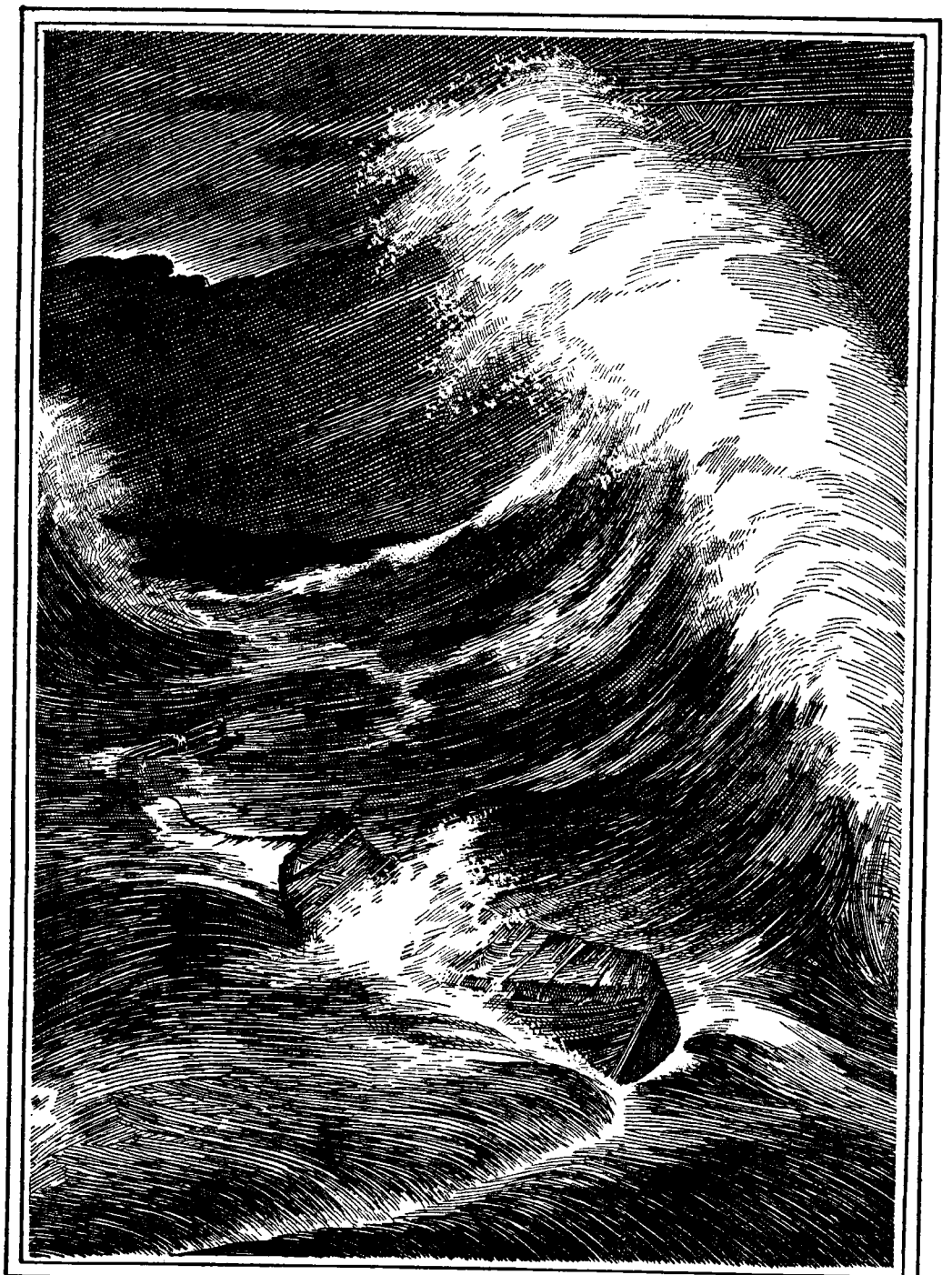

THE GREAT STORM

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Here, for the space of a minute, we paused to survey the prospect, and I saw that the island was of a very strange shape, having a great hump of black rock at either end, and dipping down into a steep valley between them. In this valley there seemed to be a deal of a strange vegetation that had the appearance of mighty toadstools. Down nearer the beach there was a thick grove of a kind of very tall reed, and these we discovered afterwards to be exceeding tough and light, having something of the qualities of the bamboo.

Regarding the beach, it might have been most reasonably supposed that it would be very thick with the drift-weed. But this was not so, at least, not at that time; though a projecting horn of the black rock which ran out into the sea from the upper end of the island, was thick with it.

The bo'sun having assured himself that there was no appearance of any danger, we bent to our oars. And presently we had the boat aground upon the beach, and here, finding it convenient, we made our breakfast. During this meal, the bo'sun discussed with us the most proper thing to do, and it was decided to push the boat off from the shore, leaving Job in her, whilst the remainder of us made some exploration of the island.

Having made an end of eating, we proceeded as we had determined. We left Job in the boat, ready to scull ashore for us if we were pursued by any savage creature. The rest of us made our way towards the nearer hump, from which, as it stood some hundred feet above the sea, we hoped to get a very good idea of the remainder of the island. First, however, the bo'sun handed out to us the two cutlasses and the cut-and-thrust (the other two cutlasses being in Josh's boat), and, taking one himself, he passed me the cut-and-thrust, and gave the other cutlass to the biggest of the men. He bade the others keep their sheath-knives handy, and was proceeding to lead the way, when one of them called out to us to wait a moment, and ran quickly to the clump of reeds. Here, he took one with both his hands and bent upon it; but it would not break, so that he had to notch it about with his knife, and thus, in a little, he had it clear.

He cut off the upper part, which was too thin and lissom for his purpose, and thrust the handle of his knife into the end of the portion which he had retained, and in this wise he had a most serviceable lance or spear. For the reeds were very strong, and hollow after the fashion of bamboo, and when he had bound some yarn about the end into which he had thrust his knife, so as to prevent it splitting, it was a fit enough weapon for any man.

The bo'sun, perceiving the happiness of the fellow's idea, bade the rest make to themselves similar weapons, and whilst they were busy thus, he commended the man very warmly.

Being now most comfortably armed, we made inland towards the nearer black hill, in very good spirits. Soon we were come to the rock which formed the hill, and found that it came up out of the sand with great abruptness, so that we could not climb it on the seaward side. The bo'sun led us around a space towards that side where lay the valley, and here there was under-foot neither sand nor rock, but ground of some strange and spongy texture.

Rounding a jutting spurt of the rock, we came upon the first of the vegetation —an incredible mushroom; nay, I should say toadstool; for it had no healthy look about it, and gave out a heavy, mouldy odour. We perceived that the valley was filled with them, all, that is, save a great circular patch where nothing appeared to be growing. We were not yet at a sufficient height to ascertain the reason of this.

PRESENTLY we came to a place where the rock was split by a great fissure running up to the top, and showing many ledges and convenient shelves upon which we might obtain hold and footing. We set-to about climbing, helping one another so far as we had ability, until, in about the space of some ten minutes, we reached the top, and from thence had a very fine view. We perceived now that there was a beach upon that side of the island which was opposed to the weed; though, unlike that upon which we had landed, it was greatly choked with weed which had drifted ashore.

I gave notice to see what space of water lay between the island and the edge of the great weed-continent, and guessed it to be no more than maybe some ninety yards. I fell to wishing that it had been greater, for I was grown much in awe of the weed and the strange things which I conceived it to contain.

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Abruptly, the bo'sun clapped me upon the shoulder, and pointed to some object that lay out in the weed at a distance of not much less than the half of a mile from where we stood. At first, I could not conceive what manner of thing it was at which I stared, until the bo'sun, remarking my bewilderment, informed me that it was a vessel all covered in, no doubt as a protection against the devil-fish and other strange creatures in the weed.

I began to trace the hull of her amid all that hideous growth; but of her masts I could discern nothing. I doubted not but that they had been carried away by some storm ere she was caught by the weed; and the thought came to me of the end of those who had built up that protection against the horrors which the weed-world held hidden amid its slime.

I turned my gaze once more upon the island, which was very plain to see from where we stood. I conceived, now that I could see so much of it, that its length would be near to half a mile, though its breadth was something under four hundred yards. Thus it was very long in proportion to its width. In the middle part it had less breadth than at the ends, being perhaps three hundred yards at its narrowest, and a hundred yards wider at its broadest.

Upon both sides of the island, as I have made already a mention, there was a beach, though this extended no great distance along the shore, the remainder being composed of the black rock of which the hills were formed. And now, having a closer regard to the beach upon the weed-side of the island, I discovered amid the wrack that had been cast ashore a portion of the lower mast and topmast of some great ship, with rigging attached; but the yards were all gone. This find I pointed out to the bo'sun, remarking that it might prove of use for firing. He smiled at me, telling me that the dried weed would make a very abundant fire, and this without going to the labour of cutting the mast into suitable logs.

He, in turn, called my attention to the place where the huge fungi had come to a stop in their growing, and I saw that in the centre of the valley there was a great circular opening in the earth, like to the mouth of a prodigious pit. It appeared to be filled to within a few feet of the mouth with water, over which was spread a brown and horrid scum. I stared with some intentness at this; for it had the look of having been made with labour, being very symmetrical; yet I could not conceive but that I was deluded by the distance, and that it would have a rougher appearance when viewed from a nearer standpoint.

From contemplating this, I looked down upon the little bay in which our boat floated. Job was sitting in the stern, sculling gently with the steering oar and watching us. I waved my hand to him in friendly fashion, and he waved back, and even as I looked I saw something in the water under the boat—something dark coloured that was all a-move. The boat appeared to be floating over it as over a mass of sunk weed, and I saw that, whatever it was, it was rising to the surface. A sudden horror came over me, and I clutched the bo'sun by the arm, and pointed, crying out that there was something under the boat.

The bo'sun, so soon as he saw the thing, ran forward to the brow of the hill. Placing his hands to his mouth after the fashion of a trumpet, he sang out to the boy to bring the boat to the shore and make fast the painter to a large piece of rock. The lad called out "i,i," and, standing up,

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gave a sweep with his oar that brought the boat's head round towards the beach.

Fortunately for him he was no more than some thirty yards from the shore at this time, else he had never come to it in this life. For the next moment the moving brown mass beneath the boat shot out a great tentacle and the oar was torn out of Job's hands with such power as to throw him right over on to the starboard gunnel of the boat. The oar itself was drawn down out of sight, and for the minute the boat was left untouched. The bo'sun cried out to the boy to take another oar, and get ashore while still he had chance. We all called out various things, one advising one thing, and another recommending some other. But our advice was vain, for the boy moved not, at which some cried out that he was stunned.

I looked now to where the brown thing had been, for the boat had moved a few fathoms from the spot, having got some way upon her before the oar was snatched, and thus I discovered that the monster had disappeared, having, I conceived, sunk again into the depths from which it had risen. Yet it might re-appear at any moment, and in that case the boy would be taken before our eyes.

THE bo'sun called to us to follow him, and led the way to the great fissure up which we had climbed, and in a minute, we were, each of us, scrambling down with what haste we could make towards the valley. And all the while, as I dropped from ledge to ledge, I was full of torment to know whether the monster had returned.

The bo'sun was the first man to reach the bottom of the cleft, and he set off immediately round the base of the rock to the beach, the rest of us following him as we made safe our footing in the valley. I was the third man down; but, being light and fleet of foot, I passed the second man and caught up with the bo'sun just as he came out upon the sand. Here, I found that the boat was within some five fathoms of the beach, and I could see Job still lying insensible; but of the monster there was no sign.

I could not imagine how to save the lad, and indeed I fear he had been left to destruction—for I had deemed it madness to try to reach the boat by swimming—but for the extraordinary bravery of the bo'sun, who, without hesitating, dashed into the water and swam boldly out to the boat. He reached it without mishap, and climbed in over the bows. Immediately, he took the painter and hove it to us, bidding us tail on to it and bring the boat to shore without delay. By this method of gaining the beach he showed wisdom; for in this wise he escaped attracting the attention of the monster by unneedful stirring of the water, as he would surely have done had he made use of an oar.

Despite his care, however, we had not finished with the creature; for, just as the boat grounded, I saw the lost steering oar shoot up half its length out of the sea, and immediately there was a mighty splather in the water astern. The next instant the air seemed full of huge, whirling arms.

The bo'sun gave one look behind, and seeing the thing upon him, snatched the boy into his arms, and sprang over the bows on to the sand.

At sight of the devil-fish, we had all made for the back of the beach at a run, none troubling even to retain the painter, and because of this, we were like to have lost the boat; for the great cuttle-fish had its arms all splayed about it, seeming to have a mind to drag it down into the deep water from whence it had risen, and it had possibly succeeded, but that the bo'sun brought us all to our senses. Having laid Job out of harm's way, he was the first to seize the painter, which lay trailed upon the sand, and, at that, we got back our courage, and ran to assist him.

There happened to be convenient a great spike of rock, the same, indeed, to which the bo'sun had bidden Job tie the boat, and to this we ran the painter, taking a couple of turns about it and two half-hitches. Now, unless the rope carried away, we had no reason to fear the loss of the boat; though there seemed to us to be a danger of the creature's crushing it. Because of this, and because of a feeling of natural anger against the thing, the bo'sun took up from the sand one of the spears which had been cast down when we hauled the boat ashore. With this, he went down so far as seemed safe, and prodded the creature in one of its tentacles, the weapon entering easily. At this I was surprised, for I had understood that these monsters were near to invulnerable in all parts save their eyes.

Upon receiving this stab, the great fish appeared to feel no hurt, for it showed no signs of pain. The bo'sun was further emboldened by this to go nearer, so that he might deliver a more deadly wound. Yet

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scarce had he taken two steps before the hideous thing was upon him, and, but for an agility wonderful in so great a man, he had been destroyed. But, spite of so narrow an escape from death, he was not the less determined to wound or destroy the creature, and, to this end, he despatched some of us to the grove of reeds to cut half a dozen of the strongest, and when we returned with these, he bade two of the men lash their spears securely to them. By this means they had now spears of a length of between some thirty and forty feet.

The bo'sun took one of the spears, telling the biggest of the men to take the other. Then he directed him to aim for the right eye of the huge fish whilst he would attack the left.

Since the creature had so nearly captured the bo'sun, it had ceased to tug at the boat, and lay quiet; with its tentacles spread all about it, and its great eyes appearing just over the stern. It presented an appearance of watching our movements; though I doubt if it saw us with any clearness; for it must have been dazed with the brightness of the sunshine.

The bo'sun gave the signal to attack, at which he and the man ran down upon the creature with their lances, as it were, in rest. The bo'sun's spear took the monster truly in its left eye. But the one wielded by the man was too bendable and sagged so much that it struck the stern-post of the boat, the knife-blade snapping off short. Yet it mattered not; for the sound inflicted by the bo'sun's weapon was so frightful that the giant cuttle-fish released the boat, and slid back into deep water, churning it into foam, and gouting blood.

We waited some minutes to make sure that the monster had indeed gone, and after that we hastened to the boat and drew her up so far as we were able; after which we unloaded the heaviest of her contents, and got her clear of the water.

For an hour afterwards the sea all about the little beach was stained black, and in places red.

CHAPTER IV

THE NOISES IN THE VALLEY

WHEN we had gotten the boat into safety, the which we did with a most feverish haste, the bo'sun gave his attention to Job. The boy had not yet recovered from the blow which the loom of the oar had dealt him beneath the chin when the monster snatched it. For awhile, these attentions produced no effect; but when the lad's face had been bathed with water from the sea, and rum rubbed into his breast over the heart, he began to show signs of life, and soon opened his eyes.

The bo'sun gave him a stiff jorum of the rum, after which he asked him how he seemed in himself. Job replied in a weak voice that he was dizzy and his head and neck ached badly.

We left him in quietness under a little shade of canvas and reeds, for the air was warm and the sand dry and he was not like to come to any great harm lying there.

At a little distance, under the directing of the bo'sun, we made to prepare dinner; for we were now very hungry, it seeming a great while since we had broken our fast.

To this end, the bo'sun sent two of the men across the island to gather some of the dry seaweed. For we intended to cook some of the salt meat, this being the first cooked meal since ending the meat which we had boiled before leaving the ship in the creek.

In the meanwhile, and until the return of the men with the fuel, the bo'sun kept us busied in various ways. Two he sent to cut a faggot of the reeds, and another couple to bring the meat and the iron boiler, the latter being one that we had taken from the old brig.

Presently, the men returned with the dried seaweed, and very curious stuff it seemed, some of it being in chunks near as thick as a man's body; but exceeding brittle by reason of its dryness. In a little, we had a very good fire going. We fed it with the seaweed and pieces of the reeds, though we found the latter to be but indifferent fuel, having too much sap, and being troublesome to break into convenient size.

When the fire had grown red and hot, the bo'sun half filled the boiler with sea water, in which he placed the meat. And as the pan had a stout lid he did not scruple to place it in the very heart of the fire, so that soon we had the contents boiling merrily.

Having gotten the dinner under way, the bo'sun set about preparing our camp for the night, which we did by making a rough framework with the reeds, over

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which we spread the boat's sails and the cover, pegging the canvas down with tough splinters of the reed. When this was completed, we set-to and carried there all our stores, after which the bo'sun took us over to the other side of the island to gather fuel for the night, which we did, each man bearing a great double armful of it.

By the time that we had brought over, each of us, two loads of the fuel, we found the meat to be cooked, and so, without more to-do, set ourselves down and made a very good meal off it and some biscuits, after which we had each of us a sound tot of the rum. Having made an end of eating and drinking, the bo'sun went over to where Job lay, to inquire how he felt, and found him lying very quiet, though his breathing had a heavy touch about it. However, we could conceive of nothing by which he might be bettered, and so left him, being more hopeful that Nature would bring him to health than any skill of which we were possessed.

By this time it was late afternoon, so that the bo'sun declared we might please ourselves until sunet, deeming that we had earned a very good right to rest; but that from sunset till the dawn we should, he told us, have each of us to take turn and turn about to watch. Though we were no longer upon the water, none might say whether we were out of danger or not, as witness the happening of the morning; though, certainly, he apprehended no danger from the devil-fish so long as we kept well away from the water's edge.

From then until dark most of the men slept; but the bo'sun spent much of that time in overhauling the boat, to see how it might chance to have suffered during the storm, and also whether the struggles of the great devil-fish had strained it in any way.

It was speedily evident that the boat would need some attention; for the plank in her bottom next but one to the keel, upon the starboard side, had been burst inward. This had been done, it would seem, by some rock in the beach hidden just beneath the water's edge, the devil-fish having, no doubt, ground the boat down upon it. Happily, the damage was not great; though it would most certainly have to be carefully repaired before the boat would be again seaworthy.

I had not felt any call to sleep, and had followed the bo'sun to the boat, giving him a hand to remove the bottom-boards, and finally to slue her bottom a little upwards, so that he might examine the leak more closely.

TOWARDS evening the bo'sun asked me to bring across one of the longer of the bottom-boards, which I did, and we made use of it as a stretcher to carry Job into the tent. After that we carried all the loose woodwork of the boat into the tent, emptying the lockers of their contents. This included some oakum, a small boat's hatchet, a coil of one-and-a-half-inch hemp line, a good saw, an empty colza-oil tin, a bag of copper nails, some bolts and washers, two fishing-lines, three spare tholes, a three-pronged grain with out the shaft, two balls of spun yarn, three hanks of roping-twine, a piece of canvas with four roping-needles stuck in it, the boat's lamp, a spare plug, and a roll of light duck for making boat's sails.

When dark came down upon the island, the bo'sun waked the men and bade them throw more fuel on to the fire, which had burned down to a mound of glowing embers much shrouded in ash. One of them part filled the boiler with fresh water, and soon we were occupied most pleasantly upon a supper of cold, boiled salt-meat, hard biscuits, and rum mixed with hot water. During supper, the bo'sun made clear to the men regarding the watches, arranging how they should follow, so that I found I was set down to take my turn watching from midnight until one of the clock.

Soon after this we made each one of us a comfortable place in the sand within the tent, and lay down to sleep. For a while, I found myself very wakeful, which may have been because of the warmth of the night, and, indeed, at last, I got up and went out of the tent, conceiving that I might the better find sleep in the open air.

Having lain down at the side of the tent, a little away from the fire, I fell soon into a deep slumber, which at first was dreamless. Presently, however, I came upon a very strange and unsettling dream; for I dreamed that I had been left alone on the island, and was sitting very desolate upon the edge of the hideous brown-scummed pit.

I was aware suddenly that it was very dark and very silent, and I began to shiver; for it seemed to me that something which repulsed my whole being had come quietly behind me. I tried mightily to turn

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and look into the shadows among the great fungi that stood all about me; but I had no power to turn. The thing was coming nearer, though never a sound came to me, and I gave out a scream, or tried to; but my voice made no stir in the rounding quiet. And then something wet and cold touched my face, and slithered down and covered my mouth, and paused there for a vile, breathless moment. It passed onward and fell to my throat—and stayed there. . . .

Some one stumbled and fell over my feet, and I was suddenly awake. It was the man on watch taking a walk around the back of the tent, and he had not known of my presence till he fell over my boots. He was somewhat shaken and startled, as might be supposed; but steadied himself on learning that it was no wild creature crouched there in the shadow. And all the time, as I answered his inquiries, I was full of a strange, horrid feeling that something had left me at the moment of my awakening. There was a slight, hateful odour in my nostrils that was not altogether unfamiliar, and suddenly I was aware that my face was damp and that there was a curious sense of tingling at my throat. I put up one hand and felt my face, and the hand, when I brought it away, was slippery with slime. I put up my other hand, and touched my throat, and there it was the same, only, in addition, there was a slight swelled place a little to one side of the wind-pipe, the sort of place that the bite of a mosquito will make; but I had no thought to blame any mosquito.

I went over and took some of the water that had been left in the boiler and washed my face and neck, after which I felt more my own man. I asked the man to look at my throat, so that he might give me some idea of what manner of place the swelling seemed. Lighting a piece of the dry seaweed to act as a torch, he made examination of my neck. He could see but little, save a number of small ring-like marks, red inwardly, and white at the edges, and one of them was bleeding slightly.

I asked him whether he had seen anything moving around the tent; but he had seen nothing during all the time that he had been on watch; though it was true that we had heard odd noises; but nothing very near at hand.

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WHEN my turn to watch came, the man whom I had relieved sat beside me, having, I conceived, the kindly intent of keeping me company, but so soon as I perceived this, I entreated him to go and get his sleep, which he did.

For a certain space, I kept very quiet, listening; but no sound came to me out of the surrounding darkness. As though it were a fresh thing, it was borne in upon me how that we were in a very abominable place of lonesomeness and desolation. And I grew very solemn.

As I sat there, the fire, which had not been replenished for a while, dwindled steadily until it gave but a dullish glow around. And then, in the direction of the valley, I heard suddenly the sound of a dull thud, the noise coming to me through the stillness with a very startling clearness.

I perceived that I was not doing my duty to the rest, nor to myself, by sitting and allowing the fire to cease from flaming, through some strange inertia bred of fear.

I seized and cast a mass of the dry weed upon it, so that a great blaze shot up into the night. And afterwards I glanced quickly to right and to left, holding my cut-and-thrust very readily.

Even as I looked about me, there came to me across the silence of the beach a fresh noise, a continual soft slithering to and fro in the bottom of the valley, as though a multitude of creatures moved stealthily. I threw yet more fuel upon the fire, and after that I fixed my gaze in the direction of the valley; thus in the following instant it seemed to me that I saw a certain thing, as it might be a shadow, move on the outer borders of the firelight.

The man who had kept watch before me had left his spear stuck upright in the sand convenient to my grasp, and, seeing something moving, I seized the weapon and hurled it with all my strength in its direction. But there came no answering cry to tell that I had struck anything living, and immediately afterwards there fell once more a great silence upon the island, being broken only by a far splash out upon the weed.

It may be conceived with truth that all these happenings had put a very considerable strain upon my nerves, so that I looked to and fro continually, with ever and anon a quick glance behind me. It seemed to me that I might expect some demoniac creature to rush upon me at any moment. Yet, for the space of many minutes, there came to me neither any sight nor sound of living creature. I knew not what to think, being near to doubting if I had heard aught beyond the common.

But even as I made halt upon the threshold of doubt, I was assured that I had not been mistaken. For, abruptly, I was aware that all the valley was full of a rustling, scampering sort of noise, through which there came to me occasional soft thuds, and anon the former slithering sounds. At that, thinking a host of evil things to be upon us, I cried out to the bo'sun and the men to awake.

Immediately upon my shout, the bo'sun rushed out from the tent, the men following, and every one with his weapon, save the man who had left his spear in the sand, and that lay now somewhere beyond the light of the fire. The bo'sun shouted, to know what thing had caused me to cry out; but I replied nothing, only held up my hand for quietness. When this was granted, the noises in the valley had ceased; so that the bo'sun turned to me, being in need of some explanation. I begged him to hark but a little longer, which he did, and, the sounds, re-commencing almost immediately, he heard sufficient to know that I had not waked them all without due cause.

As we stood staring into the darkness where lay the valley I seemed to see again some shadowy thing upon the boundary of the firelight. And, in the same instant, one of the men cried out and cast his spear into the darkness.

There came again a quietness within the valley, and none knowing what might be toward, the bo'sun caught up a mass of the dry weed, and, lighting it at the fire, ran with it towards that portion of the beach which lay between us and the valley. Here he cast it upon the sand, singing out to some of the men to bring more of the weed, so that we might have a fire there, and thus be able to see if anything made to come at us out of the deepness of the hollow.

Presently, we had a very good fire, and by the light of this the two spears were discovered, both of them stuck in the sand, and no more than a yard one from the other, which seemed to me a very strange thing.

For a while after the lighting of the second fire there came no further sounds from the direction of the valley, nothing indeed to break the quietness of the island,

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save the occasional lonely splashes that sounded from time to time out in the vastness of the weed-continent.

About a hour after I had waked the bo'sun, one of the men who had been tending the fires came up to him to say that we had come to the end of our supply of weed-fuel. The bo'sun looked very blank, the which did the rest of us. Yet there was no help for it, until one of the men bethought him of the remainder of the faggot of reeds which we had cut, and which, burning but poorly, we had discarded for the weed. This was discovered at the back of the tent, and with it we fed the fire that burned between us and the valley. But the other fire we suffered to die out, for the reeds were not sufficient to support even the one until the dawn.

Whilst it was still dark we came to the end of our fuel, and as the fire died down, so did the noises in the valley re-commence. We stood in the growing dark, each one keeping a very ready weapon, and a more ready glance. At times the island would be mightily quiet, and then again the sounds of things crawling in the valley. Yet, I think the silences tried us the more.

So at last came the dawn.

WITH the coming of the dawn, a lasting silence stole across the island and into the valley, and, conceiving that we had nothing more to fear, the bo'sun bade us get some rest, whilst he kept watch. And so I got at last a very substantial little spell of sleep, which made me fit enough for the day's work.

After some hours had passed, the bo'sun roused us to go with him to the further side of the island to gather fuel, and soon we were back with each a load, so that in a little we had the fire going right merrily.

For breakfast, we had a hash of broken biscuit, salt meat and some shell-fish which the bo'sun had picked up from the beach at the foot of the further hill. The whole was right liberally flavoured with some of the vinegar which the bo'sun said would help keep down any scurvy that might be threatening us. And at the end of the meal he served out to us each a little of the molasses, which we mixed with hot water, and drank.

The meal being ended, he went into the tent to take a look at Job, the which he had already done in the early morning. The condition of the lad preyed somewhat upon him; he being, for all his size and top-roughness, a man of surprisingly tender heart. The boy remained much as on the previous evening, so that we knew not what to do with him to bring him into better health. One thing we tried, knowing that no food had passed his lips since the previous morning, and that was to get some little quantity of hot water, rum and molasses down his throat; for it seemed to us he might die from very lack of food. But though we worked with him for more than the half of an hour, we could not get him to come-to sufficiently to take anything, and without that we had fear of suffocating him.

Presently, we had perforce to leave him within the tent, and go about our business; for there was very much to be done.

Before we did aught else, the bo'sun led us all into the valley, being determined to make a very thorough exploration of it, perchance there might be any lurking beast or devil-thing waiting to rush out and destroy us as we worked. And more, he would make search that he might discover what manner of creatures had disturbed our night.

In the early morning, when we had gone for the fuel, we had kept to the upper skirt of the valley where the rock of the nearer hill came down into the spongy ground. But now we struck right down into the middle part of the vale, making a way amid the mighty fungi to the pit-like opening that filled the bottom of the valley. Though the ground was very soft, there was in it so much of springiness that it left no trace of our steps after we had gone on a little way, none, that is, save that in odd places a wet patch followed upon our treading.

When we got ourselves near to the pit, the ground became softer, so that our feet sank into it, and left very real impressions. And here we found tracks most curious and bewildering; for amid the slush that edged the pit—which I would mention here had less the look of a pit now that I had come near to it—were multitudes of markings which I can liken to nothing so much as the tracks of mighty slugs amid the mud. However, they were not altogether like to that of slugs, for there were other markings such as might have been made by bunches of eels cast down and picked up continually. At least, this is what they suggested to me, and I do put it down as such.

Apart from the markings which I have

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mentioned, there was everywhere a deal of slime, and this we traced all over the valley among the great toadstool plants. But, beyond that which I have already remarked, we found nothing. Nay, but I was near to forgetting, we found a quantity of this thin slime upon those fungi which filled the end of the little valley nearest to our encampment, and here also we discovered many of them fresh broken or uprooted, and there was the same mark of the beast upon them all. And now I remembered the dull thuds that I had heard in the night, and made little doubt but that the creatures had climbed the great toadstools so that they might spy us out. And it may be that many climbed upon one, so that their weight broke the fungi, or uprooted them.

We made an end of our search, and after that, the bo'sun set each one of us to work. But first he had us all back to the beach to give a hand to turn over the boat, so that he might get to the damaged part. Having the bottom of the boat full to his view, he made discovery that there was other damage beside that of the burst plank. The bottom plank of all had come away from the keel, which seemed to us a very serious matter; though it did not show when the boat was upon her bilges. Yet the bo'sun assured us that he had no doubts but that she could be made seaworthy; though it would take a greater while than hitherto he had thought needful.

HAVING concluded his examination of the boat, the bo'sun sent one of the men to bring the bottom-boards out of the tent; for he needed some planking for the repair of the damage.

When the boards had been brought, he needed still something which they could not supply, and this was a length of very sound wood of some three inches in breadth each way. This he intended to bolt against the starboard side of the keel, after he had gotten the planking replaced so far as was possible. He had hopes that by means of this device he would be able to nail the bottom plank to this, and then caulk it with oakum, so making the boat almost as sound as ever.

Hearing him express his need for such a piece of timber, we were all adrift to know from whence such a thing could be gotten, until there came suddenly to me a memory of the mast and topmast upon the other side of the island, and at once I made mention of them. The bo'sun nodded, saying that we might get the timber out of it, though it would be a work requiring some considerable labour, in that we had only a hand-saw and a small hatchet. He sent us across to be getting it clear of the weed, promising to follow when he had made an end of trying to get the two displaced planks back into position.

Having reached the spars, we set-to with a very good will to shift away the weed and wrack that was piled over them, and very much entangled with the rigging. Presently we had laid them bare, and so we discovered them to be in remarkably sound condition, the lowermast especially being a fine piece of timber. All the lower and topmast standing rigging was still attached, though in places the lower rigging was stranded so far as half-way up the shrouds. Yet there remained much that was good and all of it quite free from rot, and of the very finest quality of white hemp, such as is to be seen only in the best found vessels.

About the time that we had finished clearing the weed, the bo'sun came over to us, bringing with him the saw and the hatchet. Under his directions we cut the lanyards of the topmast rigging, and after that sawed through the topmast just above the cap. This was a very tough piece of work, and employed us a great part of the morning, even though we took turn and turn at the saw. And when it was done we were mightily glad that the bo'sun bade one of the men go over with some weed and make up the fire for dinner, after which he was to put on a piece of the salt meat to boil.

In the meanwhile, the bo'sun had started to cut through the topmast, about fifteen feet beyond the first cut, for that was the length of the batten he required. So wearisome was the work that we had not gotten more than half through with it before the man whom the bo'sun had sent returned to say that the dinner was ready. When this was dispatched, and we had rested a little over our pipes, the bo'sun rose and led us back; for he was determined to get through with the topmast before dark.

Relieving each other frequently, we completed the second cut, and after that the bo'sun set us to saw a block about twelve inches deep from the remaining portion of the topmast. From this, when we had cut it, he proceeded to hew wedges with the hatchet. Then he notched the

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end of the fifteen-foot log, and into the notch he drove the wedges. And so, towards evening, as much, maybe, by good luck as good management, he had divided the log into two halves—the split running very fairly down the centre.

Perceiving how that it drew near to sundown, he bade the men haste and gather weed and carry it across to our camp; but one he sent along the shore to make a search for shell-fish among the weed. He himself ceased not to work at the divided log, and kept me with him as helper.

Within the next hour, we had a length, maybe some four inches in diameter, split off the whole length of one of the halves, and with this he was very well content; though it seemed but a very little result for so much labour.

By this time the dusk was upon us, and the men, having made an end of weed carrying, were returned to us, and stood about, waiting for the bo'sun to go into camp. At this moment, the man the bo'sun had sent to gather shell-fish, returned, and he had a great crab upon his spear, which he had spitted through the belly. This creature could not have been less than a foot across the back, and had a very formidable appearance. Yet it proved to be a most tasty matter for our supper, when it had been placed for a while in boiling water.

So soon as this man was returned, we made at once for the camp, carrying with us the piece of timber which we had hewn from the topmast. By this time it was quite dusk, and very strange amid the great fungi as we struck across the upper edge of the valley to the opposite beach. Particularly, I noticed that the hateful, mouldy odour of these monstrous vegetables was more offensive than I had found it to be in the daytime. This may be because I used my nose the more, in that I could not use my eyes to any great extent.

WE HAD gotten half way across the top of the valley, and the gloom was deepening steadily, when there stole to me upon the calmness of the evening air, a faint smell; something quite different from that of the surrounding fungi. A moment later I got a great whiff of it, and was near sickened with the abomination of it. The memory of that foul thing which had come to the side of the boat in the dawn-gloom, before we discovered the island, roused me to a terror beyond that of the sickness of my stomach. For, suddenly, I knew what manner of thing it was that had beslimed my face and throat upon the previous night, and left its hideous stench lingering in my nostrils.

With the knowledge, I cried out to the bo-sun to make haste, for there were demons with us in the valley. Some of the men made to run. But he bade them, in a very grim voice, stay where they were, and keep well together, else would they be attacked and overcome, straddled all among the fungi in the dark. And this, being, I doubt not, as much in fear of the rounding dark as of the bo-sun, they did. And so we came safely out of the valley; though there seemed to follow us a little lower down the slope an uncanny slithering.

As soon as we reached the camp, the bo'sun ordered four fires to be lit—one on each side of the tent. This we did, lighting them at the embers of our old fire, which we had most foolishly allowed to die down. When the fires had been going, we put on the boiler, and treated the great crab as I have already mentioned, and so fell-to upon a very hearty supper. But as we ate, each man had his weapon stuck in the sand beside him. For we had knowledge

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that the valley held some devilish thing, or maybe many; though the knowing did not spoil our appetites.

Whilst the men were taking their ease with the circle of the fires after supper the bo'sun lit one of the dips which he had out of the ship in the creek, and went in to see how Job was, after the day's rest.

I rose up, reproaching myself for having forgotten the poor lad, and followed the bo'sun into the tent. I had but reached the opening, when he gave out a loud cry, and held the candle low down to the sand. At that, I saw the reason for his agitation; for, in the place where he had left Job, there was nothing.

I stepped into the tent, and, in the same instant, there came to my nostrils the faint odour of the horrible stench which had come to me in the valley, and before then from the thing that came to the side of the boat. Suddenly, I knew that Job had fallen the prey of those foul things, and, knowing this, I called out to the bo'sun that *they* had taken the boy. And then my eyes caught the smear of slime upon the sand, and I had proof that I was not mistaken.

As soon as the bo'sun knew all that was in my mind, though indeed it did but corroborate that which had come to his own, he came swiftly out from the tent. He bid the men to stand back, for they had come all about the entrance, being very much discomposed at that which the bo'sun had discovered. Then the bo'sun took from a faggot of the reeds, which they had cut at the time when he had bidden them gather fuel, several of the thickest, and to one of these he bound a great mass of the dry weed. The men, divining his intention, did likewise with the others, and so we had each of us the wherewithal for a mighty torch.

When we had completed our preparations, we took each man his weapon, and, plunging our torches into the fires, set off along the track which had been made by the devil-things and the body of poor Job. For now that we had suspicion that harm had come to him, the marks in the sand, and the slime, were very plain to be seen, so that it was wonderful that we had not discovered them earlier.

The bo'sun led the way, and, finding the marks led direct to the valley, he broke into a run, holding his torch well above his head. At that, each of us did likewise; for we had a great desire to be together. And further than this, I think with truth I may say, we were all fierce to avenge Job, so that we had less of fear in our hearts than otherwise had been the case.

IN LESS than the half of a minute we had reached the end of the valley; but here, the ground being of a nature not happy in the revealing of tracks, we were at fault to know in which direction to continue. The bo'sun set up a loud shout to Job, perchance he might be yet alive; but there came no answer to us, save a low and uncomfortable echo. The bo'sun desiring to waste no more time, ran straight down towards the centre of the valley, and we followed, and kept our eyes very open about us.

We were perhaps half way, when one of the men shouted that he saw something ahead. But the bo'sun had seen it earlier; for he was running straight down upon it, holding his torch high and swinging his great cutlass. Instead of smiting, he fell upon his knees beside it, and the following instant we were up with him, and in that same moment it seemed to me that I saw a number of white shapes melt swiftly into the shadows further ahead. But I had no thought for these when I perceived that by which the bo'sun knelt. For it was the stark body of Job, and no inch of it but was covered with the little ringed marks that I had discovered upon my throat, and from every place there ran a trickle of blood, so that he was a most horrid and fearsome sight.

At the sight of Job so mangled and bebled, there came over us the sudden quiet of a mortal terror, and in that space of silence, the bo'sun placed his hand over the poor lad's heart. But there was no movement, though the body was still warm. Immediately he rose to his feet, a look of vast wrath upon his great face. He plucked his torch from the ground, into which he had plunged the haft, and stared around into the silence of the valley. But there was no living thing in sight, nothing save the giant fungi and the strange shadows cast by our great torches, and the loneliness.

At this moment, one of the men's torches, having burnt near out, fell all to pieces, so that he held nothing but the charred support, and immediately two more came to a like end. We became afraid that they would not last us back to the camp, and we looked to the bo'sun to know his wish. But the man was very silent, and peering everywhere into the

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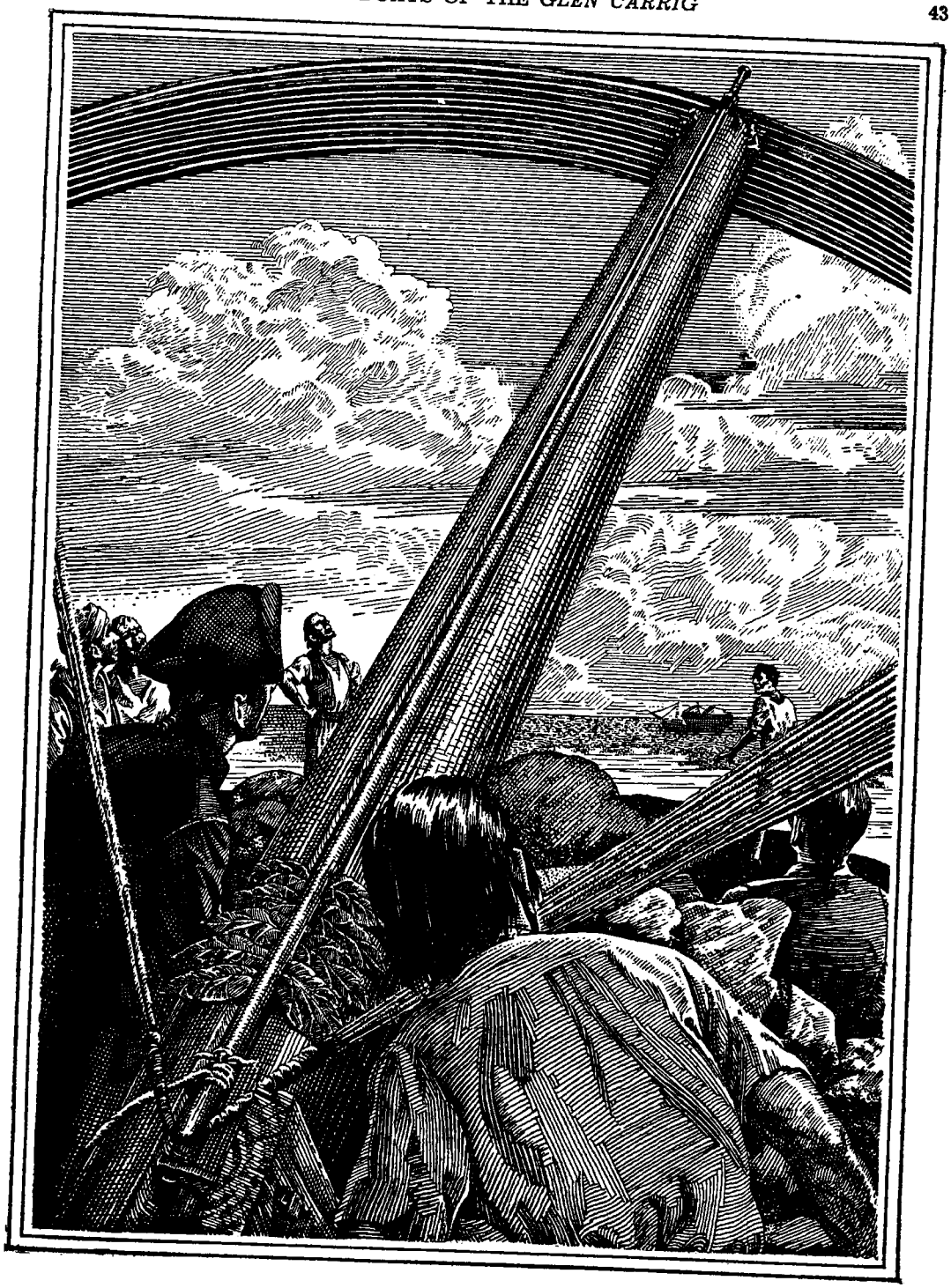

And now it seemed that we had but to get the true aim of the great bow, to rescue the people in the weed-trapped hulk

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shadows. Then a fourth torch fell to the ground in a shower of embers, and I turned to look. In the same instant there came a great flare of light behind me, accompanied by the dull thud of a dry matter set suddenly alight.

I glanced swiftly back to the bo'sun, and he was staring up at one of the giant toadstools which was in flames all along its nearer edge, and burning with an incredible fury, sending out spirits of flame, and anon giving out sharp reports. At each report a fine powder was belched in thin streams; which, getting into our throats and nostrils, set us sneezing and coughing most lamentably.

Whether it had come to the bo'sun to set alight this first of the fungi, I know not; for it may be that his torch coming by chance against it set it afire. However it chanced, the bo'sun took it as a veritable hint from Providence, and was already setting his torch to one a little further off, whilst the rest of us were near to choking with our coughings and sneezings.

Yet, for all that we were so suddenly overcome by the potence of the powder, I doubt if a full minute passed before we were each one busied after the manner of the bo'sun. Those whose torches had burned out, knocked flaming pieces from the burning fungus, and with these impaled upon their torch-sticks, did so much execution as any.

Thus it happened that within five minutes of the discovery of Job's body, the whole of that hideous valley sent up to heaven the reek of its burning; whilst we, filled with murderous desires, ran hither and thither with our weapons, seeking to destroy the vile creatures that had brought the poor lad to so unholy a death. Yet nowhere could we discover any brute or creature upon which to ease our vengeance, and so, presently, the valley becoming impassible by reason of the heat, the flying sparks and the abundance of the acrid dust, we made back to the body of the boy, and bore him thence to the shore.

During all that night no man of us slept, and the burning of the fungi sent up a mighty pillar of flame out of the valley, as out of the mouth of a monstrous pit, and when the morning came it still burned. When it was daylight, some of us slept, being greatly awearied; but some kept watch.

And when we waked there was a great wind and rain upon the island.

CHAPTER V

THE LIGHT IN THE WEED

THE wind was very violent from the sea, and threatened to blow down our tent, which, indeed, it achieved at last as we made an end of a cheerless breakfast. The bo'sun bade us not trouble to put it up again, but spread it out with the edges raised upon props made from the reeds, so that we might catch some of the rain water. It was become imperative that we should renew our supply before putting out again to sea. And whilst some of us were busied about this, he took the others and set up a small tent made of the spare canvas, and under this he sheltered all of our matters like to be harmed by the rain.

Upon the ceasing of the rain, the bo'sun called us all together, that we might make a decent burial of the unfortunate lad, whose remains had lain during the night upon one of the bottom-boards of the boat. After a little discussion, it was decided to bury him on the beach; for the only other part where there was soft earth was in the valley, and none of us had a stomach for that place. Moreover, the sand was soft and easy to dig, and as we had no proper tools, this was a great consideration. Using the bottom-boards and the oars and the hatchet, we had a place large and deep enough to hold the boy, and into this we placed him. We made no prayer over him; but stood about the grave for a little space, in silence. Then the bo'sun signed to us to fill in the sand; and, therewith, we covered up the poor lad, and left him to his sleep.

After dinner the bo'sun served out to each one of us a very sound tot of the rum; for he was minded to bring us back again to a cheerful state of mind.

We sat awhile, smoking, and then the bo'sun divided us into two parties to make a search through the island among the rocks, perchance we should find water, collected from the rain, among the hollows and crevasses.

The bo'sun headed one party, and set the big seaman over the other, bidding all to keep their weapons very handy. He set out to the rocks about the base of the nearer hill, sending the others to the farther and greater one.

After much scrambling amid the rocks, we came upon a little pool of water that was remarkably sweet and fresh, and from this we removed near three gallons

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before it became dry. And after that we came across, maybe, five or six others; but not one of them near so big as the first; yet we were not displeased; for we had near three parts filled our breaker. And so we made back to the camp, having some wonder as to the luck of the other party.

WHEN we came near to the camp, we found the others returned before us, and seeming in a very high content with themselves; so that we had no need to call to them as to whether they had filled their breaker. When they saw us, they set out to us at a run to tell us that they had come upon a great basin of fresh water in a deep hollow a third of the distance up the side of the far hill. The bo'sun bade us put down our breaker and make all of us to the hill, so that he might examine for himself whether their news was so good as it seemed.

Guided by the other party, we passed round to the back of the far hill, and discovered it to go upward to the top at an easy slope, with many ledges and broken places, so that it was scarce more difficult than a stair to climb. Having climbed perhaps ninety or a hundred feet, we came suddenly upon the place which held the water, and found that they had not made too much of their discovery. The pool was near twenty feet long by twelve broad, and so clear as though it had come from a fountain.

Having waited until the bo'sun had made complete his examination, we turned to descend, thinking that this would be the bo'sun's intention. But he called us to stay, and, looking back, we saw that he made to finish the ascent of the hill. We hastened to follow him, though we had no notion of his reason for going higher. When we were come to the top, we found a very spacious place, nicely level save that in one or two parts it was crossed by deepish cracks, maybe half a foot to a foot wide, and perhaps three to six fathoms long. But, apart from these and some great boulders, it was, as I have mentioned, a spacious place. Moreover it was bone dry and pleasantly firm under one's feet, after so long upon the sand.

I think, even thus early, I had some notion of the bo'sun's design. I went to the edge that overlooked the valley, and peered down, and found it nigh a sheer precipice. Looking about me, I discovered the bo'sun to be surveying that part which looked over towards the weed, and I made across to join him. Here, again, I saw that the hill fell away very sheer, and after that we went across to the seaward edge, and there it was near as abrupt as on the weed side.

Having by this time thought a little upon the matter, I put it straight to the bo'sun that here would make indeed a very secure camping place. There was nothing to come at us upon our sides or back; and our front, where was the slope, could be watched with ease. This I put to him with great warmth; for I was mortally in dread of the coming night.

The bo'sun disclosed to me that this was his intent, and immediately he called to the men that we should haste down and ship our camp to the top of the hill. And we began straightway to move our gear to the hill-top.

In the meanwhile, the bo'sun, taking me to assist him, set-to again upon the boat. He was intent to get his batten nicely shaped and fit to the side of the keel, so that it would bed well to the keel, but more particularly to the plank which had sprung outward from its place. At this he laboured the greater part of the afternoon, using the little hatchet to shape the wood, which he did with surprising skill. Yet when the evening was come he had not brought it to his liking. But it must not be thought that he did naught but work at the boat; for he had the men to direct, and once he had to make his way to the top of the hill to fix the place for the tent.

After the tent was up, he set them to carry the dry weed to the new camp, and at this he kept them until near dusk; for he had vowed never again to be without a sufficiency of fuel. Two of the men he sent to collect shell-fish—putting two of them to the task because he would not have one alone upon the island, not knowing but that there might be danger, even though it were bright day. And a most happy ruling it proved; for, a little past the middle of the afternoon, we heard them shouting at the other end of the valley.

Not knowing but that they were in need of assistance, we ran with all haste to discover the reason of their calling, passing along the right-hand side of the blackened and sodden vale. Upon reaching the further beach, we saw a most incredible sight. The two men were running towards us through the thick masses of the weed, while, no more than four or five fathoms behind, they were pursued by an enormous crab.

I had thought the crab we had tried to capture before coming to the island a prodigy unsurpassed; but this creature was

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more than treble its size, seeming as though a prodigious table were a-chase of them. Moreover, spite of its monstrous bulk, it made better way over the weed than I should have conceived to be possible—running almost sideways, and with one enormous claw raised near a dozen feet into the air.

WHETHER, omitting accidents, the men would have made good their escape to the firmer ground of the valley, where they could have attained to a greater speed, I do not know, but suddenly one of them tripped over a loop of the weed, and the next instant lay helpless upon his face. He had been dead the following moment, but for the pluck of his companion, who faced round manfully upon the monster, and ran at it with his twenty-foot spear.

It seemed to me that the spear took it about a foot below the overhanging armour of the great back shell, and I could see that it penetrated some distance into the creature, the man having, by the aid of Providence, stricken it in a vulnerable part. Upon receiving this thrust, the mighty crab ceased at once its pursuit, and clipped at the haft of the spear with its great mandible, snapping the weapon more easily than I had done the same thing to a straw. By the time we had raced up to the men, the one who had stumbled, was again upon his feet, and turning to assist his comrade. The bo'sun snatched his spear from him, and leapt forward himself; for the crab was making now at the other man.

The bo'sun did not attempt to thrust the spear into the monster; but instead he made two swift blows at the great protruding eyes, and in a moment the creature had curled itself up, helpless, save that the huge claw wavered about aimlessly. The bo'sun drew us off; though the man who had attacked the crab desired to make an end of it, averring that we should get some very good eating out of it. But to this the bo'sun would not listen; telling him that it was yet capable of very deadly mischief, did any but come within reach of its prodigious mandible.

After this, he bade them look no more for shell-fish; but take out the two fishing-lines which we had, and see if they could catch aught from some safe ledge on the further side of the hill upon which we had made our camp. Then he returned to his mending of the boat.

It was a little before the evening came down upon the island, that the bo'sun ceased work. He called to the men, who, having made an end of their fuel carrying, were standing near, to place the full breakers—which we had not thought needful to carry to the new camp on account of their weight—under the upturned boat. Some held up the gunnel whilst the others pushed the breakers under. The bo'sun laid the unfinished batten along with them, and we lowered the boat again over all, trusting to its weight to prevent any creature from meddling with aught.

After that, we made at once for the camp, being wearifully tired, and with a hearty anticipation of supper. Upon reaching the hill top, the men whom the bo'sun had sent with the lines, came to show him a very fine fish, something like a huge king-fish, which they had caught a few minutes earlier. This, the bo'sun, after examining, did not hesitate to pronounce fit for food; whereupon they set-to and opened and cleaned it.

As I have said, it was not unlike a great king-fish, and like it, had a mouth full of very formidable teeth; the use of which I understood the better when I saw the contents of its stomach. It seemed to consist of nothing but the coiled tentacles of squid or cuttle-fish, with which, as I have shown, the weed-continent swarmed. When these were upset upon the rock, I was confounded to perceive the length and thickness of some of them. I could only conceive that this particular fish must be a very desperate enemy to them, and able successfully to attack monsters of a bulk infinitely greater than its own.

Whilst the supper was preparing, the bo'sun called to some of the men to put up a piece of the spare canvas upon a couple of the reeds, so as to make a screen against the wind, which up there was so fresh that it came near at times to scattering the fire abroad.

AFTER supper the night drew on apace, yet it was not so dark but that we could perceive matters at a very reasonable distance. Being in a mood that tended to thoughtfulness, and feeling a desire to be alone for a little, I strolled away from the fire to the leeward edge of the hill top. Here, I paced up and down awhile, smoking and meditating. Anon, I would stare out across the immensity of the vast continent of weed and slime that stretched its incredible desolation out beyond the darkening horizon, and there would come the thought to me of the terror of men whose vessels had been entangled among its strange growths. And so my thoughts came

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to the lone derelict that lay out there in the dusk, and I fell to wondering what had been the end of her people, and at that I grew yet more solemn in my heart.

Soon I came back to the fire, and soon, it not being my time to watch until after midnight, I turned into the tent for a spell of sleep, having first arranged a comfortable spread of some of the softer portions of the dry weed to make me a bed.

I was very full of sleep, so that I slept heavily, and in this wise heard not the man on watch call the bo'sun; yet the rousing of the others waked me, and so I came to myself and found the tent empty, at which I ran very hurriedly to the doorway. I discovered that there was a clear moon in the sky, in which, by reason of the cloudiness that had prevailed, we had been without for the past two nights. I stepped out the entrance of the tent, and the following instant discovered the others all in a clump beside the leeward edge of the hill top. I held my tongue, for I knew not but that silence might be their desire; but I ran hastily over to them, and inquired of the bo'sun what manner of thing it was which called them from their sleep. For answer, he pointed out into the greatness of the weed-continent.

I stared out over the breadth of the weed, showing very ghostly in the moonlight; but, for the moment, I saw not the thing to which he purposed to draw my attention. Suddenly it fell within the circle of my gaze—a little light out of the lonesomeness. I stared with bewildered eyes; then it came to me with abruptness that the light shone from the lone derelict lying out in the weed, the same that, upon that very evening, I had seen with sorrow and awe, because of the end of those who had been in her. A light was burning, seemingly within one of her after cabins, though the moon was scarce powerful enough to enable the outline of the hulk to be seen clear of the rounding wilderness.

From this time, until the day, we had no more sleep; but made up the fire, and sat round it, full of excitement and wonder, and getting up continually to discover if the light still burned. This it ceased to do about an hour after I had first seen it; but it was the more proof that some of our kind were no more than the half of a mile from our camp.

And so the night ended.

SO SOON as it was clearly daylight, we went all of us to the leeward brow of the hill to stare upon the derelict, but an inhabited vessel. Though we watched her for upwards of two hours, we could discover no sign of any living creature. Had we been in cooler minds, we would not have thought it strange, seeing that she was all so shut in by the great superstructure. But we were hot to see a fellow creature, after so much lonesomeness and terror in strange lands and seas, and so could not by any means contain ourselves in patience until those aboard the hulk should choose finally to discover themselves to us.

At last, being wearied with watching, we made it up together to shout when the bo'sun should give us the signal, by this means making a good volume of sound which we conceived the wind might carry down to the vessel. But though we raised many shouts, making as it seemed to us a very great noise, there came no response from the ship. And at last we were fain to cease from our calling, and ponder some other way of bringing ourselves to the notice of those whom we believed to be within the hulk.

For awhile we talked, some proposing one thing, and some another; but none of them seeming like to achieve our purpose. And after that we fell to marvelling that the fire which we had lit in the valley had not awakened them to the fact that some of their fellow creatures were upon the island. For, had it, we could not suppose but that they would have kept a perpetual watch upon the island until such time as they should have been able to attract our notice. Nay! more than this, it was scarce credible that they should not have made an answering fire, or set some of their bunting above the superstructure, so that our gaze should be arrested upon the instant we chanced to glance towards the hulk. But so far from this, there appeared even a purpose to shun our attention; for that light which we had viewed in the past night was more in the way of an accident, than of the nature of a purposeful exhibition for our benefit.

This the bo'sun explained was because our camp hitherto had lain in a place where we had not sight, even of the great world of weed, leaving alone any view of the derelict. And more, that at such times as we had crossed to the opposite beach, we had been occupied too closely to have much thought to watch the hulk, which, indeed, from that position showed only her great superstructure. Further, that, until the preceding day, we had but once climbed to any height; and that from our

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present camp the derelict could not be viewed, and to do so, we had to go near the leeward edge of the hill top.

After breakfast we went all of us to see if there were yet any signs of life in the hulk; but when an hour had gone, we were no wiser. From thence on, during the day, the bo'sun gave the men a turn each at watching, telling them to wave to him should there come any sign from the hulk. Excepting the watch, he kept every man so busy as might be, some bringing weed to keep up a fire which he had lit near the boat; one to help him turn and hold the batten upon which he laboured; and two he sent across to the wreck of the mast, to detach one of the futtock shrouds, which (as is most rare) were made of iron rods. This, when they brought it, he bade me heat in the fire, and afterwards beat out straight at one end. When this was done, he set me to burn holes with it through the keel of the boat, at such places as he had marked, these being for the bolts with which he had determined to fasten on the batten.

In the meanwhile, he continued to shape the batten until it was a very good and true fit according to his liking.

AFTER dinner, in the middle of the day, when we had smoked and rested very comfortably, for the bo'sun was no tyrant, we rose at his bidding to descend once more to the beach. But at this moment, one of the men having run to the edge of the hill to take a short look at the hulk, cried out that a part of the great superstructure over the quarter had been removed, or pushed back. There was a figure there, seeming, so far as his unaided sight could tell, to be looking through a spy-glass at the island. It would be difficult to tell of all our excitement at this news, and we ran eagerly to see for ourselves if it could be as he informed us. And so it was; for we could see the person very clearly; though remote and small because of the distance. That he had seen us, we discovered in a moment; for he began suddenly to wave something, which I judged to be the spy-glass, in a very wild manner, seeming also to be jumping up and down. I doubt not but that we were as much excited, for suddenly I discovered myself to be shouting with the rest in a most insane fashion, and moreover I was waving my hands and running to and fro upon the brow of the hill.

I observed that the figure on the hulk had disappeared; but it was for no more than a moment. Then it was back and there were near a dozen with it, and it seemed to me that some of them were females; but the distance was over great for surety.

These, all of them, seeing us upon the brow of the hill, where we must have shown up plain against the sky, began at once to wave in a very frantic way. And we, replying in like manner, shouted ourselves hoarse with vain greetings. But soon we grew wearied of the unsatisfactoriness of this method of showing our excitement, and one took a piece of the spare canvas, and let it stream out into the wind, waving it to them. Another took a second piece and did likewise, while a third man rolled up a short bit into a cone and made use of it as a speaking trumpet; though I doubt if his voice carried any the further because of it. For my part, I had seized one of the long bamboo-like reeds which were lying about near the fire, and with this I was making a very brave show. So very great and genuine was our exaltation upon our discovery of these poor people shut off from the world within that lonesome craft.

Then, suddenly, it seemed to come to us to realize that *they* were among the weed, and *we* upon the hill top, and that we had no means of bridging that which lay between. We faced one another to discuss what we should do to effect the rescue of those within the hulk.

It was little that we could even suggest; for though one spoke of how he had seen a rope cast by means of a mortar to a ship that lay off shore, yet this helped us not, for we had no mortar. Here the same man cried out that they in the ship might have such a thing, so that they would be able to shoot the rope to us, and at this we thought more upon his saying; for if they had such a weapon, then might our difficulties be solved.

We were greatly at a loss to know how we should discover whether they were possessed of one, and further to explain our design to them. But the bo'sun came to our help, and bade one man go quickly and char some of the reeds in the fire, and whilst this was doing he spread out upon the rock one of the spare lengths of canvas. Then he sung out to the man to bring him one of the pieces of charred reed, and with this he wrote our question upon the canvas, calling for fresh charcoal as he required it. Having made an

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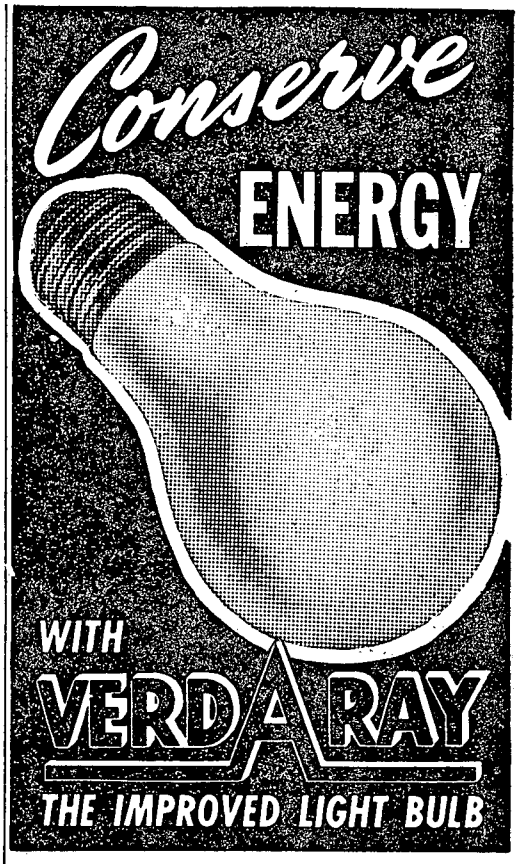
end of writing, he bade two of the men take hold of the canvas by the ends, and expose it to the view of those in the ship. In this manner we got them to understand our desires. For, presently, some of them went away, and came back after a little, and held up for us to see, a very great square of white, and upon it a great "NO."

We were again at our wits' ends to know how it would be possible to rescue those within the ship, and suddenly our whole desire to leave the island was changed into a determination to rescue the people in the hulk. Indeed, had our intentions not been such we had been veritable curs; though I am happy to tell that we had no thought at this juncture but for those who were now looking to us to restore them once more to the world to which they had been so long strangers.

IT SEEMED to me possible to use a bow to throw a rope to the hulk, if only we could find the material with which to make such a weapon, and with this in view, I took up one of the lengths of the bamboo-like reed, and tried the spring of it, which I found to be very good. For this curious growth, of which I have spoken hitherto as a reed, had no resemblance to that plant, beyond its appearance; it being extraordinary tough and woody, and having considerably more nature than a bamboo. Having tried the spring of it, I went over to the tent and cut a piece of sampson-line which I found among the gear, and with this and the reed I contrived a rough bow. Then I looked about until I came upon a very young and slender reed which had been cut with the rest, and from this I fashioned some sort of an arrow, feathering it with a piece of one of the broad, stiff leaves, which grew upon the plant. And after that I went forth to the crowd about the leeward edge of the hill.

When they saw me thus armed, they seemed to think that I intended a jest, and some of them laughed, conceiving that it was a very odd action on my part. But when I explained that which was in my mind, they ceased from laughter, and shook their heads, making that I did but waste time; for, as they said, nothing save gunpowder could cover so great a distance. They turned again to the bo'sun, with whom some of them seemed to be in argument. And so for a little space I held my peace, and listened; thus I discovered that certain of the men advocated the taking



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of the boat—so soon as it was sufficiently repaired—and making a passage through the weed to the ship, which they proposed to do by cutting a narrow canal. But the bo'sun shook his head, and reminded them of the great devil-fish and crabs, and the worse things which the weed concealed. He said that those in the ship would have done it long since had it been possible, and at that the men were silenced, being robbed of their unreasoning ardour by his warnings.

Conceiving that this was a good point at which to renew my importunities, I began once again to explain the probabilities of my plan succeeding, addressing myself more particularly to the bo'sun. I told how that I had read that the ancients made mighty weapons, some of which could throw a great stone so heavy as two men, over a distance surpassing a quarter of a mile. Moreover, that they compassed huge catapults which threw a lance, or great arrow, even further. On this, he expressed much surprise, never having heard of the like; but doubted greatly that we should be able to construct such a weapon. I told him that I was prepared for I had the plan of one clearly in my mind. I pointed out to him also that we had the wind in our favour, and that we were a great height up, which would allow the arrow to travel the farther before it came so low as the weed.

Then I stepped to the edge of the hill, and bidding him watch, fitted my arrow to the string, and, having bent the bow, loosed it. Being aided by the wind and the height on which I stood, the arrow plunged into the weed at a distance of near two hundred yards from where we stood, that being about a quarter of the distance on the road to the derelict.

The bo'sun was won over to my idea, though, as he remarked, the arrow had fallen nearer had it been drawing a length of yarn after it. To this I assented; but pointed out that my bow-and-arrow was but a rough affair, and, more, that I was no archer. Yet I promised him, with the bow that I should make, to cast a shaft clean over the hulk, did he but give me his assistance, and bid all of the men to help.

As I have come to regard it in the light of greater knowledge, my promise was exceeding rash; but I had faith in my conception, and was very eager to put it to the test; the which, after much discussion at supper, it was decided I should be allowed to do.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAKING OF THE GREAT BOW

THE fourth night upon the island was the first to pass without incident. It is true that a light showed from the hulk out in the weed; but now that we had made some acquaintance with her inmates, it was no longer a cause for excitement, so much as contemplation. As for the valley where the vile things had made an end of Job, it was very silent and desolate under the moonlight; for I made a point to go and view it during my time on watch. Yet for all that it lay empty, it was very dree, and a place to conjure up uncomfortable thoughts, so that I spent no great time pondering it.

This was the second night on which we had been free from the terror of the devil-things, and it seemed to me that the great fire had put them in fear of us and driven them away. But of the truth or error of this idea I was to learn later.

It must be admitted that, apart from a short look into the valley, and occasional starings at the light out in the weed, I gave little attention to aught but my plans for the great bow. And to such use did I put my time, that when I was relieved, I had each particular and detail worked out. I knew very well just what to set the men doing so soon as we should make a start in the morning.

When the morning had come, and we had made an end of breakfast, we turned-to upon the great bow, the bo'sun directing the men under my supervision. The first matter to which I bent attention was the raising, to the top of the hill, of the remaining half of that portion of the top-mast which the bo'sun had split in twain to procure the batten for the boat. To this end, we went down, all of us, to the beach where lay the wreckage, and, getting about the portion which I intended to use, carried it to the foot of the hill. Then we sent a man to the top to let down the rope by which we had moored the boat to the sea anchor, and when we had bent this on securely to the piece of timber, we returned to the hilltop, and tailed on to the rope. After much weariful pulling, we had it up.

The next thing I desired was that the split face of the timber should be dubbed straight, and this the bo'sun undertook to do. Whilst he was about it, I went with some of the men to the grove of reeds, and here, with great care, I made a selection

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The Weed Men~

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of some of the finest, these being for the bow. After that I cut some which were very clean and straight, intending them for the great arrows. With these we returned once more to the camp, and there I set-to and trimmed them of their leaves, keeping these latter, for I had a use for them. I took a dozen reeds and cut them each to a length of twenty-five feet, and afterwards notched them for the strings. In the meanwhile, I had sent two men down to the wreckage of the masts to cut away a couple of the hempen shrouds and bring them to the camp. And then I set them to work to unlay the shrouds, so that they might get out the fine white yarns which lay beneath the outer covering of tar and blacking. These, when they had come at them, we found to be very good and sound, and this being so, I bid them make three-yarn sennit; meaning it for the strings of the bows.

It will be observed that I have said bows, and this I will explain. It had been my original intention to make one great bow, lashing a dozen of the reeds together for the purpose. But this, upon pondering it, I conceived to be but a poor plan; for there would be much life and power lost in the rendering of each piece through the lashings, when the bow was released. To obviate this, and further, to compass the bending of the bow, the which had, at first, been a source of puzzlement to me as to how it was to be accomplished, I had determined to make twelve separate bows. These I intended to fasten at the end of the stock one above the other, so that they were all in one plane vertically, and because of this conception, I should be able to bend the bows one at a time, and slip each string over the catch-notch, and afterwards frap the twelve strings together in the middle part so that they would be but one string to the butt of the arrow. All this I explained to the bo'sun, who, indeed, had been exercised in his own mind as to how we should be able to bend such a bow as I intended to make. He was mightily pleased with my method of evading this difficulty, and also one other, which, else, had been greater than the bending, and that was the *stringing* of the bow, which would have proved a very awkward work.

PRESENTLY, the bo'sun called out to me that he had got the surface of the stock sufficiently smooth and nice. I went over to him; for now I wished him to burn a slight groove down the centre, running from end to end, and this I desired to be done very exactly; for upon it depended much of the true flight of the arrow. Then I went back to my own work; for I had not yet finished notching the bows. When I had made an end of this, I called for a length of the sennit, and, with the aid of another man, contrived to string one of the bows. This, when I had finished, I found to be very springy, and so stiff to bend that I had all that I could manage to do so, and at this I felt very satisfied.

It occurred to me that I should do well to set some of the men to work upon the line which the arrow was to carry; for I had determined that this should be made also from the white hemp yarns. For the sake of lightness, I conceived that one thickness of yarn would be sufficient, but so that it might compass enough of strength, I bid them split the yarns and lay the two halves up together. In this manner they made me a very light and sound line, though it must not be supposed that it was finished at once. I needed over half a mile of it, and thus it was later finished than the bow itself.

Having now gotten all things in train, I set me down to work upon one of the arrows; for I was anxious to see what sort of a fist I should make of them, knowing how much would depend upon the balance and truth of the missile. In the end, I made a very fair one, feathering it with its own leaves, and trueing and smoothing it with my knife. After this I inserted a small bolt in the forrard end, to act as a head, and, as I conceived, give it balance. Whether I was right in this latter, I am unable to say. Before I had finished my arrow, the bo'sun had made the groove, and called me over to him, that I might admire it, the which I did; for it was done with a wonderful neatness.

I have been so busy with my description of how we made the great bow that I have omitted to tell of the flight of time, and how we had eaten our dinner this long while since, and how that the people in the hulk had waved to us, and we had returned their signals, and then written upon a length of the canvas the one word, "WAIT." And, besides all this, some had gathered our fuel for the coming night.

When the evening came upon us we ceased not to work, for the bo'sun bade the men to light a second great fire, beside our former one. And by the light of this we worked another long spell; though it seemed short enough, by reason of the interest of the work. At last, the bo'sun bade

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us to stop and make supper, which we did, and after that, he set the watches, and the rest of us turned in; for we were very weary.

In spite of my previous weariness, when the man whom I relieved called me to take my watch, I felt very fresh and wide awake, and spent a great part of the time, as on the preceding night, in studying over my plans for completing the great bow. It was then that I decided finally in what manner I would secure the bows athwart the end of the stock, for until then I had been in some little doubt, being divided between several methods. However, I concluded to make twelve grooves across the sawn end of the stock, and fit the middles of the bows into these, one above the other, and then to lash them at each side to bolts driven into the sides of the stock. And with this idea I was very well pleased; for it promised to make them secure, and this without any great amount of work.

Though I spent much of my watch in thinking over the details of my prodigious weapon, yet it must not be supposed that I neglected to perform my duty as watchman; for I walked continually about the top of the hill, keeping my cut-and-thrust ready for any sudden emergency. My time passed off quietly enough; though it is true that I witnessed one thing which brought me a short spell of disquiet thought. It was in this wise:

I had come to that part of the hill top which overhung the valley, and it came to me, abruptly, to go near to the edge and look over. Thus, the moon being very bright, and the desolation of the valley reasonably clear to the eye, it appeared to me, as I looked, that I saw a movement among certain of the fungi which had not burnt, but stood up shrivelled and blackened in the valley. Yet by no means could I be sure that it was not a sudden fancy, born of the eeriness of that desolate-looking vale; the more so as I was like to be deceived because of the uncertainty which the light of the moon gives.

To prove my doubts, I went back until I had found a piece of rock easy to throw, and this, taking a short run, I cast into the valley, aiming at the spot where it had seemed to me that there had been a movement. Immediately upon this, I caught a glimpse of some moving thing, and then, more to my right, something else stirred. I looked towards it; but could discover nothing. Looking back at the clump at which I had aimed my missile, I saw that the slime-covered pool, which lay near, was all a-quiver, or so it seemed. Yet the next instant I was just as full of doubt; for, even as I watched it, I perceived that it was quite still. I kept a very strict gaze into the valley, yet could nowhere discover aught to prove my suspicions, and, at last, I ceased from watching it; for I feared to grow fanciful, and so wandered to that part of the hill which overlooked the weed.

WHEN I had been relieved, I returned to sleep, and so till the morning. When we had made each of us a hasty breakfast —for all were grown mightily keen to see the great bow completed—we set-to upon it, each at our appointed task. Thus, the bo'sun and I made it our work to make the twelve grooves athwart the flat end of the stock, into which I proposed to fit and lash the bows. This we accomplished by means of the iron futtock-shroud, which we heated in its middle part. And then, each taking an end (protecting our hands with canvas), we went one on each side and applied the iron until at length we had the grooves burnt out very nicely.

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This work occupied us all the morning; for the grooves had to be deeply burnt; and in the meantime the men had completed near enough sennit for the stringing of the bows. Yet those who were at work on the line which the arrow was to carry had scarce made more than half, so that I called off one man from the sennit to turn-to and give them a hand with the making of the line.

When dinner was ended, the bo'sun and I set-to about fitting the bows into their places, which we did, and lashed them to twenty-four bolts, twelve a side, driven into the timber of the stock, about twelve inches in from the end. After this, we bent and strung the bows, taking very great care to have each bent exactly as the one below it; for we started at the bottom.

And so, before sunset, we had that part of our work ended.

That night, when it came my turn to watch, I minded me to take a look into the valley; but though I watched at intervals through the half of an hour, I saw nothing to lead me to imagine that I had indeed seen aught on the previous night. But in the stretch of clear water which lay between the island and the weed it seemed to me that a number of great fish were swimming across from the island, diagonally towards the great continent of weed: they were swimming in one wake, and keeping a very regular line; but not breaking the water after the manner of porpoises or black fish.

As I saw them indistinctly in the moonlight, they made a queer appearance, seeming each of them to be possessed of two tails, and further, I could have thought I perceived a flicker as of tentacles just beneath the surface; but of this I was by no means sure.

Upon the following morning, having hurried our breakfast, each of us set-to again upon our tasks; for we were in hopes to have the great bow at work before dinner. Soon, the bo'sun had finished his arrow, and mine was completed very shortly after, so that there lacked nothing now to the completion of our work, save the finishing of the line, and the getting of the bow into position. This latter, assisted by the men, we proceeded now to effect, making a level bed of rocks near the edge of the hill which overlooked the weed.

Upon this we placed the great bow, and then, having sent the men back to their work at the line, we proceeded to the aiming of the huge weapon. When we had gotten the instrument pointed, as we conceived, straight over the hulk, the which we accomplished by squinting along the groove which the bo-sun had burnt down the centre of the stock, we turned-to upon the arranging of the notch and trigger. The notch was to hold the strings when the weapon was set, and the trigger —a board bolted on loosely at the side just below the notch—to push them upwards out of this place when we desired to discharge the bow. This part of the work took up no great portion of our time, and soon we had all ready for the first flight.

Then we commenced to set the bows, bending the bottom one first, and then those above in turn, until all were set; and, after that, we laid the arrow very carefully in the groove. I took two pieces of spunyarn and frapped the strings together at each end of the notch, and by this means I was assured that all the strings would act in unison when striking the butt of the arrow. And so we had all things ready for the discharge; whereupon, I placed my foot upon the trigger, and, bidding the bo'sun watch carefully the flight of the arrow, pushed downwards.

The next instant, with a mighty twang, and a quiver that made the great stock stir on its bed of rocks, the bow sprang to its lesser tension, hurling the arrow outwards and upwards in a vast arc. Now, it may be conceived with what mortal interest we watched its flight, and so in a minute discovered that we had aimed too much to the right; for the arrow struck the weed ahead of the hulk—but *beyond* it.

I was filled near to bursting with pride and joy, and the men who had come forward to witness the trial shouted to acclaim my success, whilst the bo-sun clapt me twice upon the shoulder to signify his regard, and shouted as loud as any.

It seemed to me that we had but to get the true aim, and the rescue of those in the hulk would be but a matter of another day or two. For, having once gotten a line to the hulk, we should haul across a thin rope by its means, and with this a thicker one. After this we should set this up so taut as possible, and then bring the people in the hulk to the island by means of a seat and block which we should haul to and fro along the supporting line.

Having realized that the bow would indeed carry so far as the wreck, we made haste to try our second arrow. At the same time we bade the men go back to

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their work upon the line, for we should have need of it in a very little while.

Having pointed the bow more to the left, I took the frappings off the strings, so that we could bend the bows singly, and after that we set the great weapon again. Then, seeing that the arrow was straight in the groove, I replaced the frappings, and immediately discharged it. This time, to my very great pleasure and pride, the arrow went with a wonderful straightness toward the ship, and, clearing the superstructure, passed out of our sight as it fell behind it.

I was all impatience to try to get the line to the hulk before we made our dinner; but the men had not yet laid-up sufficient; there being then only four hundred and fifty fathoms (which the bo'sun measured off by stretching it along his arms and across his chest). This being so, we went to dinner, and made very great haste through it; and, after that, every one of us worked at the line, and so in about an hour we had sufficient. For I had estimated that it would not be wise to make the attempt with a less length than five hundred fathoms.

Having now completed a sufficiency of the line, the bo'sun set one of the men to flake it down very carefully upon the rock beside the bow, whilst he himself tested it at all such parts as he thought in any way doubtful. And so, presently, all was ready. Then I bent it on to the arrow, and, having set the bow whilst the men were flaking down the line, I was prepared immediately to discharge the weapon.

All the morning, a man upon the hulk had observed us through a spy-glass, from a position that brought his head just above the edge of the superstructure. Being aware of our intentions—having watched the previous flights—he understood the bo'sun, when he beckoned to him, that we had made ready for a third shot. And so, with an answering wave of his spy-glass, he disappeared from our sight.

Having first turned to see that all were clear of the line, I pressed down the trigger, my heart beating very fast and thick, and so in a moment the arrow was sped. But now, doubtless because of the weight of the line, it made nowhere near so good a flight as on the previous occasion, the arrow striking the weed some two hundred yards short of the hulk, and at this, I could near have wept with vexation and disappointment.

Immediately upon the failure of my shot, the bo'sun called to the men to haul in the line very carefully, so that it should not be parted through the arrow catching in the weed. Then he came over to me, and proposed that we should set-to at once to make a heavier arrow, suggesting that it had been lack of weight in the missile which had caused it to fall short. At that, I felt once more hopeful, and turned-to at once to prepare a new arrow; the bo'sun doing likewise; though in his case he intended to make a lighter one than that which had failed. For, as he put it, though the heavier one fell short, yet might the lighter succeed, and if neither, then we could only suppose that the bow lacked power to carry the line. In that case we should have to try some other method.

In about two hours, I had made my arrow, the bo'sun having finished his a little earlier; and so (the men having hauled in all the line and flaked it down ready) we prepared to make another attempt to cast it over the hulk. Yet, a second time we failed, and by so much that it seemed hopeless to think of success. But, for all that it appeared useless, the bo'sun insisted on making a last try with the light arrow, and, presently, when we had gotten the line ready again, we loosed upon the wreck. But in this case so lamentable was our failure, that I cried out to the bo'sun to set the useless thing upon the fire and burn it. I was sorely irked by its failure, and could scarce abide to speak civilly of it.

The bo'sun, perceiving how I felt, sung out that we would cease troubling about the hulk for the present, and go down all of us to gather reeds and weed for the fire; for it was drawing nigh to evening. This we did, though all in a disconsolate condition of mind; for we had seemed so near to success, and now it appeared to be further than ever from us. Taking our places about the fire, we fell-to upon a discussion as to how we should come at the people in the hulk.

For a while there came no suggestion worthy of notice, until at last one cried out to know why a kite would not do. I was confounded, in that so simple an expedient had not occurred to any before. Surely it would be but a little matter to float a line to them by means of a kite, and, further, such a thing would take no great making.

After a space of talk it was decided that upon the morning we should build some sort of kite, and with it fly a line over the

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hulk, the which should be a task of no great difficulty with so good a breeze as we had continually with us.

Presently, having made our supper off a very fine fish, which the two fishermen had caught whilst we talked, the bo'sun set the watches, and the rest turned-in.

CHAPTER VII

THE WEED MAN

ON THAT night, when I came to my watch, I discovered that there was no moon, and, save for such light as the fire threw, the hill top was in darkness.

Near half way through my time of watching there came to me out of the immensity of weed that lay to leeward a far distant sound that grew upon my ear, rising and rising into a fearsome screaming and shrieking, and then dying away into the distance in queer sobs, and so at last to a note below that of the wind's.

I was somewhat shaken in myself to hear so dread a noise coming out of all that desolation. And then, suddenly, the thought came to me that the screaming was from the ship to leeward of us, and I ran immediately to the edge of the cliff overlooking the weed, and stared into the darkness. I perceived, by a light which burned in the hulk, that the screaming had come from some place a great distance to the right of her.

I stood nervously pondering, and peering away into the blackness of the night; thus, in a little, I perceived a dull glow upon the horizon, and, presently, there rose into view the upper edge of the moon. There came again to me the beginning of that screaming, somewhat like to the sound of a woman sobbing with a giant's voice, and it grew and strengthened until it pierced through the roar of the wind with an amazing clearness. And then slowly, and seeming to echo and echo, it sank away into the distance, and there was again in my ears no sound beyond that of the wind.

Having looked fixedly in the direction from which the sound had proceeded, I ran straightway to the tent and roused the bo'sun, who followed me to the edge of the leeward cliff and stood there with me, waiting and listening, perchance there might come again a recurrence of the noise.

For perhaps something over an hour we stood there very silent and listening; but there came to us no sound beyond the continuous noise of the wind. By that time, having grown somewhat impatient of waiting, and the moon being well risen, the bo'sun beckoned to me to make the round of the camp with him.

Just as I turned away, chancing to look downward at the clear water directly below, I was amazed to see that an innumerable multitude of great fish, like unto those which I had seen on the previous night, were swimming from the weed-continent toward the island.

I called to the bo'sun to come and see; for he had gone on a few paces. Upon hearing my call, he came running back.

PRESENTLY, however, he turned away, saying that we did foolishly to stand peering at every curious sight, when we should be looking to the welfare of the camp. And so we began to go the round of the hill top. Now, whilst we had been watching and listening, we had suffered the fire to die down to a most unwise lowness, and consequently, though the moon was rising, there was by no means the same brightness that should have made the camp light. On perceiving this, I went forward to throw some fuel on to the fire, and even as I moved it semed to me that I saw something stir in the shadow of the tent. I ran towards the place, uttering a shout, and waving my cut-and-thrust; yet I found nothing, and so, feeling somewhat foolish, I turned to make up the fire, as had been my intention. Whilst I was thus busied, the bo'sun came running over to me to know what I had seen. And in the same instant there ran three of the men out of the tent, all of them awaked by my sudden cry.

But I had naught to tell them, save that my fancy had played me a trick, and had shown me something where my eyes could find nothing, and at that, two of the men went back to resume their sleep. The third, the big fellow to whom the bo'sun had given the other cutlass, came with us, bringing his weapon. Though he kept silent, it seemed to me that he had gathered something of our uneasiness; and for my part I was not sorry to have his company.

We came to that portion of the hill which overhung the valley, and I went to the edge of the cliff, intending to peer over; for the valley had a very unholy fascination for me. No sooner had I glanced down than I started, and ran back to the bo'sun and plucked him by the

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sleeve. Perceiving my agitation, he came with me in silence to see what matter had caused me so much quiet excitement. When he looked over, he also was astounded, and drew back instantly; then, using great caution, he bent forward once more, and stared down. The big seaman came up behind, walking upon his toes, and stooped to see what manner of thing we had discovered. We each of us stared down upon a most unearthly sight; for the valley all beneath us was a-swarm with moving creatures, white and unwholesome in the moonlight, and their movements were somewhat like the movements of monstrous slugs. Though the things themselves had no resemblance to such in their contours, but minded me of naked humans, very fleshy and crawling upon their stomachs, yet their movements lacked not a surprising rapidity.

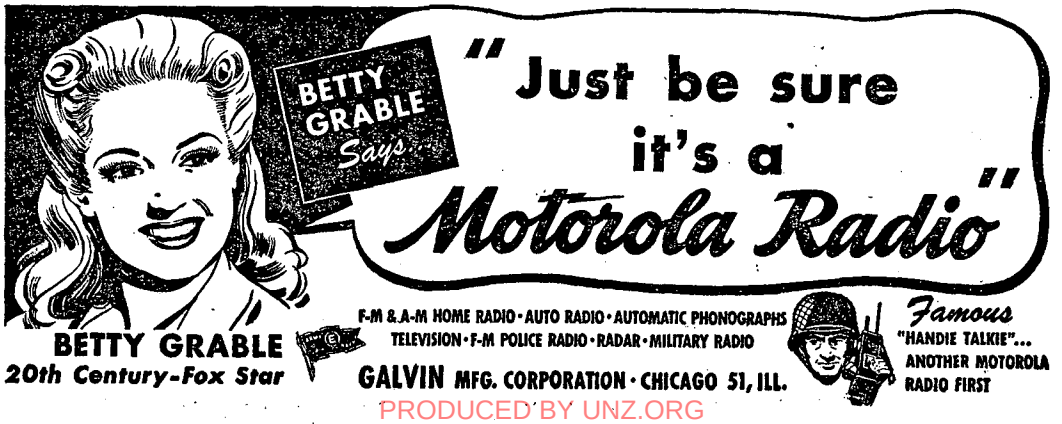
Looking a little over the bo'sun's shoulder, I discovered that these hideous things were coming up out from the pit-like pool in the bottom of the valley, and, suddenly, I was minded of the multitudes of strange fish which we had seen swimming towards the island; but which had all disappeared before reaching the shore. I had no doubt but that they entered the pit through some natural passage known to them beneath the water. I remembered having seen the flicker of tentacles on the water creatures I had watched the previous night. These things below us had each two short and stumpy, hateful and wriggling masses of small tentacles, which slid hither and thither as the creatures moved about the bottom of the valley. And at their hinder ends, where they should have grown feet, there seemed other flickering bunches.

It is scarcely possible to convey the extraordinary disgust which the sight of these human slugs bred in me. Nor, could I, do I think I would; for were I successful, then would others be like to retch even as I did, the spasm coming on without premonition, and born of very horror. And then, suddenly, even as I stared, sick wiith loathing and apprehension, there came into view, not a fathom below my feet, a face like to the face which had peered up into my own on that night, as we drifted beside the weed-continent.

I could have screamed, had I been in less terror; for the great eyes, so big as crown pieces, the bill like to an inverted parrot's, and the slug-like undulating of its white and slimy body, bred in me the dumbness of one mortally stricken. And, even as I stayed there, my helpless body bent and rigid, the bo-sun spat a mighty curse into my ear, and, leaning forward, smote at the thing with his cutlass. For in the instant that I had seen it, it had advanced upward by so much as a yard.

At this action of the bo-sun's, I came suddenly into possession of myself, and thrust downward with so much vigour that I was like to have followed the brute's carcass; for I overbalanced, and danced giddily for a moment upon the edge of eternity. And then the bo'sun had me by the waistband, and I was back in safety. But in that instant through which I had struggled for my balance, I had discovered that the face of the cliff was near hid with the number of the things which were making up to us, and I turned to the bo'sun, crying out to him that there were thousands of them swarming up to us.

He was gone already from me, running towards the fire, and shouting to the men in the tent to haste to our help for their very lives. Then he came racing back with a great armful of weed, and after him came the big seaman, carrying a burning tuft from the camp fire. And so in a few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moments we had a blaze, and the men were bringing more weed; for we had a very good stock upon the hill top; for which the Almighty be thanked.

SCARCE had we lit one fire, when the bo'sun cried out to the big seaman to make another, further along the edge of the cliff. In the same instant I shouted, and ran over to that part of the hill which lay towards the open sea; for I had seen a number of moving things about the edge of the seaward cliff. Here there was a deal of shadow; for there were scattered certain large masses of rock about this part of the hill, and these held off both the light of the moon, and that from the fires. Here, I came abruptly upon three great shapes moving with stealthiness toward the camp, and, behind these, I saw dimly that there were others.

With a loud cry for help, I made at the three, and, as I charged, they rose up on end at me, and I found that they overtopped me, and their vile tentacles were reached out at me. Then I was smiting, and gasping, sick with a sudden stench, the stench of the creatures which I had come already to know. And then something clutched at me, something slimy and vile, and great mandibles champed in my face. But I stabbed upward and the thing fell from me, leaving me dazed and sick, and smiting weakly. Then there came a rush of feet behind, and a sudden blaze, and the bo'sun crying out encouragement. And, directly, he and the big seaman thrust themselves in front of me, hurling from them great masses of burning weed, which they had borne, each of them, upon a long reed. And immediately the things were gone, slithering hastily down over the cliff edge.

Soon I was more my own man, and made to wipe from my throat the slime left by the clutch of the monster: and afterwards I ran from fire to fire with weed, feeding them. And so a space passed, during which we had safety; for by that time we had fires all about the top of the hill, and the monsters were in mortal dread of fire, else had we been dead, all of us, that night.

A while before the dawn, we discovered, for the second time since we had been upon the island, that our fuel could not last us the night at the rate at which we were compelled to burn it. And so the bo'sun told the men to let out every second fire, and thus we staved off for a while the time when we should have to face a spell of darkness, and the things which, at present, the fires held off from us.

At last we came to the end of the weed and the reeds, and the bo'sun called out to us to watch the cliffs edges very carefully, and smite on the instant that any thing showed; but that, should he call, all were to gather by the central fire for a last stand. After that, he blasted the moon which had passed behind a great bank of cloud.

Thus matters were, and the gloom deepened as the fires sank lower and lower. Then I heard a man curse, on that part of the hill which lay towards the weed-continent, his cry coming up to me against the wind. The bo'sun shouted to us all to have a care, and directly afterwards I smote at something that rose silently above the edge of the cliff opposite to where I watched.

Perhaps a minute passed, and then there came shouts from all parts of the hill top, and I knew that the weed men were upon us, and in the same instant there came two above the edge near me, rising with a ghostly quietness, yet moving lithely. The first, I pierced somewhere in the throat, and it fell backward. But the second, though I thrust it through, caught my blade with a bunch of its tentacles, and was like to have snatched it from me, but that I kicked it in the face. At that, being, I believe, more astonished than hurt, it loosed my sword, and immediately fell away out of sight.

This had taken, in all, no more than some ten seconds; yet already I perceived so many as four others coming in view a little to my right. It seemed to me that our deaths must be very near, for I knew not how we were to cope with the creatures, coming as they were so boldly and with such rapidity. I hesitated not, but ran at them, and now I thrust not; but cut at their faces: I found this to be very effectual, for in this wise I disposed of three in as many strokes. But the fourth had come right over the cliff edge, and rose up at me upon its hinder parts, as had done those others when the bo'sun had succoured me.

I gave way, having a very lively dread; but, hearing all about me the cries of conflict, and knowing that I could expect no help, I made at the brute. Then as it stooped and reached out one of its bunches of tentacles, I sprang back, and lashed at them. Immediately I followed this up by a thrust in the stomach, and at that it

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collapsed into a writhing white ball that rolled this way and that, and so, in its agony, coming to the edge of the cliff, it fell over. I was left, sick and near helpless with the hateful stench of the brutes.

BY THIS time all the fires about the edges of the hill were sunken into dull glowing mounds of embers; though that which burnt near to the entrance of the tent was still of a good brightness. Yet this helped us but little, for we fought too far beyond the immediate circle of its beams to have benefit of it. And still the moon, at which now I threw a despairing glance, was no more than a ghostly shape behind the great bank of cloud which was passing over it. Even as I looked upward, glancing as it might be over my left shoulder, I saw, with a sudden horror, that something had come anigh me. Upon the instant, I caught the reek of the thing, and leapt fearfully to one side, turning as I sprang. Thus was I saved in the very moment of my destruction; for the creature's tentacles smeared the back of my neck as I leapt, and then I had smitten, once and again, and conquered.

Immediately after this, I discovered something to be crossing the dark space that lay between the dull mound of the nearest fire, and that which lay further along the hill top. Wasting no moment of time, I ran towards the thing, and cut it twice across the head before ever it could get upon its hind parts, in which position I had learned greatly to dread them.

No sooner had I slain this one, than there came a rush of maybe a dozen upon me, these having climbed silently over the cliff edge in the meanwhile. I dodged, and ran madly towards the glowing mound of the nearest fire, the brutes following me almost so quick as I could run. But I came to the fire the first, and then, a sudden thought coming to me, I thrust the point of my cut-and-thrust among the embers and switched a great shower of them at the creatures. I had a momentary clear vision of many white, hideous faces stretched out towards me, and brown, champing mandibles which had the upper beak shutting into the lower; and the clumped, wriggling tentacles were all a-flutter.

The gloom came again; but immediately I switched another and yet another shower of the burning embers towards them, and so, directly, I saw them give back, and then they were gone. At this, all about the edges of the hill top, I saw the fires being scattered in like manner; for others had adopted this device to help them in their sore straits.

For a little after this, I had a short breathing space, the brutes seeming to have taken fright. Yet I was full of trembling, and I glanced hither and thither, not knowing when some one or more of them would come upon me. And ever I glanced towards the moon, and prayed the Almighty that the clouds would pass quickly, else should we be all dead men; and then, as I prayed, there rose a sudden very terrible scream from one of the men, and in the same moment there came something over the edge of the cliff fronting me. But I cleft it or ever it could rise higher, and in my ears there echoed still the sudden scream which had come from that part of the hill which lay to the left of me. Yet I dared not to leave my station; for to have done so would have been to have risked all, and so I stayed, tortured by the strain of ignorance, and my own terror.

Again, I had a little spell in which I was free from molestation; nothing coming into sight so far as I could see to right or left of me. Others were less fortunate, as the curses and sounds of blows told to me.

And then, abruptly, there came another cry of pain, and I looked up again at the moon, and prayed aloud that it might come out to show some light before we were all destroyed; but it remained hid.

A sudden thought came into my brain, and I shouted at the top of my voice to the bo'sun to set the great cross-bow upon the central fire. For thus we should have a big blaze—the wood being very nice and dry. Twice I shouted to him, saying: "Burn the bow! Burn the bow!"

Immediately he replied, shouting to all the men to run to him and carry it to the fire; and this we did, and bore it to the centre fire, and then ran back with all speed to our places. Thus in a minute we had some light, and the light grew as the fire took hold of the great log, the wind fanning it to a blaze. I faced outwards, looking to see if any vile face showed above the edge before me, or to my right or left. I saw nothing, save, as it seemed to me, once a fluttering tentacle came up, a little to my right; but nothing else for a space.

Perhaps it was near five minutes later that there came another attack, and, in this, I came near to losing my life, through my folly in venturing too near the edge of the cliff. For, suddenly, there shot up out

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from the darkness below a clump of tentacles, and caught me about the left ankle. Immediately I was pulled to a sitting posture, so that both my feet were over the edge of the precipice, and it was only by the mercy of God that I had not plunged head foremost into the valley. As it was, I suffered a mighty peril; for the brute that had my foot put a vast strain upon it, trying to pull me down. But I resisted, using my hands and seat to sustain me, and so, discovering that it could not compass my end in this wise, it slacked somewhat of the stress, and bit at my boot, shearing through the hard leather, and nigh destroying my small toe.

Being no longer compelled to use both hands to retain my position, I slashed down with great fury, being maddened by the pain and the mortal fear which the creature had put upon me. Yet I was not immediately free of the brute for it caught my sword blade. But I snatched it away before it could take a proper hold, mayhaps cutting its feelers somewhat thereby; though of this I cannot be sure, for they seemed not to grip around a thing, but to *suck* to it. In a moment, by a lucky blow, I maimed it, so that it loosed me, and I was able to get back into some condition of security.

So soon as there was a sufficiency of light, we examined the valley. But there were nowhere any of the weed men, no! nor even any of their dead; for it seemed that they had carried off all such and their wounded.

Seeing that the danger was past, the bo'sun called us to the centre fire, on which burnt still the remnants of the great bow, and here we discovered for the first time that one of the men was gone from us. We made search about the hill top, and afterwards in the valley and about the island; but found him not.

CHAPTER VIII

IN COMMUNICATION

ON THE search which we made through the valley for the body of Tompkins, that being the name of the lost man, I have some doleful memories. But first, before we left the camp, the bo'sun gave us all a very sound tot of the rum, and also a biscuit apiece, and thereafter we hasted down, each man holding his weapon readily. When we were come to the beach which ended the valley upon the seaward side, the bo'sun led us along to the bottom of the hill, where the precipices came down into the softer stuff which covered the valley, and here we made a careful search, perchance he had fallen over, and lay dead or wounded near to our hands. Then, suddenly, I discovered that there was something white, down in the sea away to my left, and I climbed farther out along the ledge.

I perceived that the thing which had attracted my notice was the dead body of one of the weed men. I could see it but dimly, catching odd glimpses of it as the surface of the water smoothed at whiles.

Being convinced by this time that Tompkins was indeed done to death, we ceased our search. But first, before we left the spot, the bo'sun climbed out to get a sight of the dead weed man and after him the rest of the men for they were greatly curious to see clearly what manner of creature it was that had attacked us in the night.

Presently, having seen so much of the brute as the water would allow, they came in again to the beach, and afterwards we returned to the opposite side of the island. We crossed over to the boat to see whether it had been harmed, but found it to be untouched. Yet, that the creatures had been all about it, we could perceive by the marks.

One of the men called out that there had been something at Job's grave, which, as will be remembered, had been made in the sand some little distance from the place of our first camp. We looked all of us, and it was easy to see that it had been disturbed, and so we ran hastily to it, knowing not what to fear. We found it to be empty, for the monsters had digged down to the poor lad's body, and of it we could discover no sign. Upon this, we came to a greater horror of the weed men than ever; for we knew them now to be foul ghouls who could not let even the dead body rest in the grave.

AFTER this, the bo'sun led us all back to the hill top, and there he looked to our hurts; for one man had lost two fingers in the night's fray. Another had been bitten savagely in the left arm, whilst a third had all the skin of his face raised in weals where one of the brutes had fixed its tentacles.

All that morning we brought fuel to the hill top, both weed and reeds, resting not until midday, when the bo'sun gave us a further tot of rum, and after that set one of the men upon the dinner. He bade the

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man, Jessop by name, who had proposed to fly a kite over the vessel in the weed, to say whether he had any craft in the making of such a matter.

He spoke of no more than he could accomplish for he took two of the reeds and cut them to a length of about six feet; then he bound them together in the middle so that they formed a Saint Andrew's cross. And after that he made two more such crosses, and when these were completed, he took four reeds maybe a dozen feet long, and bade us stand them upright in the shape of a square, so that they formed the four corners. And after that he took one of the crosses and laid it in the square so that its four ends touched the four uprights, and in this position he lashed it. Then he took the second cross and lashed it midway between the top and bottom of the uprights. And after that he lashed the third at the top, so that the three of them acted as spreaders to keep the four longer reeds in their places as though they were for the uprights of a little square tower.

It came suddenly to the bo'sun that we had made no provision of cord for the flying of the kite, and he called out to the man to know what strength the kite would require. Jessop answered him that maybe tenyarn sennit would do, and this being so, the bo'sun led three of us down to the wrecked mast upon the further beach. From this we stripped all that was left of the shrouds, and carried them to the top of the hills. And so, presently, having unlaid them, we set-to upon the sennit, using ten yarns; but plaiting two as one, by which means we progressed with more speed than if we had taken them singly.

As we worked, I glanced occasionally towards Jessop, and saw that he stitched a band of the light duck around each end of the framework which he had made. These bands I judged to be about four feet wide, in this wise leaving an open space between the two, so that now the thing looked something like to a Punchinello show, only that the opening was in the wrong place, and there was too much of it. After that he bent on a bridle to two of the uprights, making this of a piece of good hemp rope which he found in the tent, and then he called out to the bo'sun that the kite was finished.

The bo'sun went over to examine it, the which did all of us; for none of us had seen the like of such a thing. And if I

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ACHES and PAINS
BUS
STOP
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misdoubt now, few of us had much faith that it would fly; for it seemed so bit and unwieldly. I think that Jessop gathered something of our thoughts; for, calling to one of us to hold the kite, lest it should blow away, he went into the tent, and brought out the remainder of the hemp line, the same from which he had cut the bridle. This, he bent on to it, and, giving the end into our hands, bade us go back with it until all the slack was taken up, he, in the meanwhile, steadying the kite. When we had gone back to the extent of the line, he shouted to us to take a very particular hold upon it, and then, stooping, caught the kite by the bottom, and threw it into the air. To our amazement, having swooped somewhat to one side, it steadied and mounted upwards into the sky like a very bird.

It appeared like a miracle to us to see so cumbrous a thing fly with so much grace and persistence.

Being well assured of the properness of the kite, the bo'sun bade us to draw it in, the which we did only with difficulty, because of its bigness and the strength of the breeze. And when we had it back again upon the hill top, Jessop moored it very securely to a great piece of rock.

After that, having received our approbation, he turned-to with us upon the making of the sennit.

AFTER three days' work on the line, we had about four hundred fathoms towards the length which we needed for our purpose, this having been reckoned at five hundred fathoms.

Before setting the kite off, the bo'sun took us down to the further beach to bring up the foot of the royal and t'gallant mast, which remained fast to the topmast, and when we had this upon the hill top, he set its ends upon two rocks. He piled a heap of great pieces upon them, leaving the middle part clear. Round this he passed the kite line a couple or three times, and then gave the end to Jessop to bend on to the bridle, and so he had all ready for paying out to the wreck.

Having nothing to do, we gathered round to watch, and, immediately, the bo'sun giving the signal, Jessop cast the kite into the air. The wind, catching it, lifted it strongly and well, so that the bo'sun could scarce pay out fast enough.

Before the kite had been let go, Jessop had bent to the forward end of it a great length of the spunyarn, so that those in the wreck could catch it as it trailed over them, and, being eager to witness whether they would secure it without trouble, we ran all of us to the edge of the hill to watch.

Thus, within five minutes from the time of the loosing of the kite, we saw the people in the ship wave to us to cease veering, and immediately afterwards the kite came swiftly downwards, by which we knew that they had the tripping-line, and were hauling upon it. At that we gave out a great cheer, and afterwards we sat about and smoked, waiting until they had read our instructions, which we had written upon the covering of the kite.

Maybe the half of an hour afterwards they signalled to us to haul upon our line, which we proceeded to do without delay, and so, after a great space, we had hauled in all of our rough line, and come upon the end of theirs, which proved to be a fine piece of three-inch hemp, new and very good. Yet we could not conceive that this would stand the stress necessary to lift so great a length clear of the weed, as would be needful, or ever we could hope to bring the people of the ship over it in safety.

We waited some little while, and presently they signalled again to us to haul, which we did, and found that they had bent on a much greater rope to the bight of the three-inch hemp, having merely intended the latter for a hauling-line by which to get the heavier rope across the weed to the island.

After a weariful time of pulling, we got the end of the bigger rope up to the hill top, and discovered it to be an extraordinarily sound rope of some four inches diameter, and smoothly laid of fine yarns, round and very true and well spun. With this we had every reason to be completely satisfied.

To the end of the big rope they had tied a letter, in a bag of oilskin, and in it they said some very warm and grateful things to us. They also set out a short code of signals by which we should be able to understand one another on certain general matters. And at the end of the letter they asked if they should send us any provision ashore. For, as they explained, it would take some little while to get the rope set up taut enough for our purpose, and the carrier fixed and in working order.

Upon reading this letter, we called out to the bo'sun that he should ask them if they would send us some soft bread; the which he did, adding thereto a request for

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lint and bandages and ointment for our hurts. And this he bade me write upon one of the great leaves from off the reeds, and at the end he told me to ask if they desired us to send them any fresh water. All of this I wrote with a sharpened splinter of reed, cutting the words into the surface of the leaf. When I had made an end of writing, I gave the leaf to the bo'sun, and he enclosed it in the oilskin bag, after which he gave the signal for those in the hulk to haul on the smaller line, and this they did.

THEY signed to us after a while to pull in again, the which we did, and so, when we hauled in a great length of their line, we came to the little oilskin bag. In it we found lint, and bandages and ointment, and a further letter which set out that they were baking bread, and would send us some so soon as it was out from the oven.

In addition to the matters for the healing of our wounds, and the letter, they had included a bundle of paper in loose sheets, some quills and an inkhorn. At the end of their epistle, they begged very earnestly of us to send them some news of the outer world, for they had been shut up in that strange continent of weed for something over seven years.

They told us then that there were twelve of them in the hulk, three of them being women, one of whom had been the captain's wife. The captain had died soon after the vessel became entangled in the weed, and along with him more than half of the ship's company, having been attacked by giant devil-fish, as they were attempting to free the vessel from the weed. Afterwards they who were left had built the superstructure as a protection against the devil-fish, and the *devil-men* as they termed them. Until it had been built, there had been no safety about the decks, either day nor night.

To our question as to whether they were in need of water, the people in the ship replied that they had a sufficiency, and, further, that they were very well supplied with provisions. The ship had sailed from London with a general cargo, among which there was a vast quantity of food in various shapes and forms. At this news we were greatly pleased, seeing that we need have no more anxiety regarding a lack of victuals. And so in the letter which I went into the tent to write, I put down that we were in no great plentitude of

She caught my two hands and shook them warmly

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provisions, at which hint I guessed they would add somewhat to the bread when it should be ready.

After that I wrote down such chief events as my memory recalled as having occurred in the course of the past seven years, and then a short account of our own adventures, up to that time. I told them of the attack which we had suffered from the weed men, and asked such questions as my curiosity and wonder prompted.

Whilst I had been writing, sitting in the mouth of the tent, I had observed, from time to time, how that the bo'sun was busied with the men in passing the end of the big rope round a mighty boulder, which lay about ten fathoms in from the edge of the cliff which overlooked the hulk. This he did, parcelling the rope where the rock was in any way sharp, so as to protect it from being cut; for which purpose he made use of some of the canvas. And by the time that I had the letter completed, the rope was made very secure to the great piece of rock. And, further, they had put a large piece of chafing gear under that part of the rope where it took the edge of the cliff.

Having, as I have said, completed the letter, I went out with it to the bo'sun; but, before placing it in the oilskin bag, he bade me add a note at the bottom, to say that the big rope was all fast, and that they could heave on it so soon as it pleased them. After that we dispatched the letter by means of the small line, the men in the hulk hauling it off to them so soon as they perceived our signals.

By this, it had come well on to the latter part of the afternoon, and the bo'sun called us to make some sort of a meal, leaving one man to watch the hulk, perchance they should signal to us. For we had missed our dinner in the excitement of the day's work, and were come now to feel the lack of it. In the midst of it, the man upon the look-out cried out that they were signalling to us from the ship, and we ran all of us to see what they desired. By the code which we had arranged between us, we found that they waited for us to haul upon the small line. This did we, and made out presently that we were hauling something across the weed, of a very fair bulk, at which we warmed to our work, guessing that it was the bread which they had promised us. And so it proved, and it was done up with great neatness in a long roll of tarpaulin. This had been wrapped around both the loaves and the rope, and lashed very securely at the ends, thus producing a taper shape convenient for passing over the weed without catching in it.

When we came to open this parcel, we discovered that my hint had taken very sound effect. There were in the parcel, besides the loaves, a boiled ham, a Dutch cheese, two bottles of port well padded from breakage, and four pounds of tobacco in plugs. At this coming of good things, we stood all of us upon the edge of the hill, and waved our thanks to those in the ship, they waving back in all good will. And after that we went back to our meal, at which we sampled the new victuals with very lusty appetites.

There was in the parcel one other matter, a letter, most neatly indited, as had been the former epistles, in a feminine hand-writing, so that I guessed they had one of the women to be their scribe. This epistle answered some of my queries, and, in particular, I remember that it informed me as to the probable cause of the strange crying which preceded the attack by the weed men.

On each of the occasions when they in the ship had suffered their attacks, there had been always this same crying, being evidently a summoning call or signal to the attack, though how given, the writer had not discovered. For the weed *devils*—this being how they in the ship spoke always of them—made never a sound when attacking, not even when wounded to the death, and, indeed, I may say here, that we never learnt the way in which that lonesome sobbing was produced. Nor, indeed, did they, or we, discover more than the merest tithe of the mysteries which that great continent of weed holds in its silence.

Another matter to which I had referred was the consistent blowing of the wind from one quarter, and this the writer told me happened for as much as six months in the year, keeping up a very steady strength. A further thing there was which gave me much interest was that the ship had not been always where we had discovered her. At one time they had been so far within the weed that they could scarce discern the open sea upon the far horizon; but at times the weed had opened in great gulfs that went yawning through the continent for scores of miles. In this way the shape and coast of the weed were being constantly altered; these happenings being for the most part at the change of the wind.

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MUCH more there was that they told us then and afterwards, how that they dried weed for their fuel, and how the rains, which fell with great heaviness at certain periods, supplied them with fresh water. Though, at times, running short, they had learnt to distil sufficient water for their needs until the next rains.

Near to the end of the epistle, there came some news of their present actions, and thus we learnt that they in the ship were busy at staying the stump of the mizzen-mast. This was the one to which they proposed to attach the big rope, taking it though a great iron-bound snatch-block, secured to the head of the stump, and then down to the mizzen-capstan, by which, and a strong tackle, they would be abled to heave the line so taut as was needful.

As we had finished our meal, the bo'sun took out the lint, bandages and ointment which they had sent up from the hulk, and proceeded to dress our hurts, beginning with him who had lost his fingers, which, happily, were making a very healthy heal. Afterwards we went all of us to the edge of the cliff, and sent back the look-out to fill such crevices in his stomach as remained yet empty. We had passed him already some sound hunks of the bread and ham and cheese, to eat whilst he kept watch.

It may have been near an hour after this, that the bo'sun pointed out to me that they in the ship had commenced to heave upon the great rope, and I stood watching it. For I knew that the bo'sun had some anxiety as to whether it would take-up sufficiently clear of the weed to allow those in the ship to be hauled along it, free from molestation by the great devil-fish.

As the evening began to draw on, the bo'sun bade us go and build our fires about the hill top, and this we did, after which we returned to learn how the rope was lifting. We perceived that it had come clear of the weed, at which we felt mightily rejoiced, and waved encouragement, chance there might be any who watched us from the hulk.

Though the rope was clear of the weed, the bight of it had to rise to a much greater height, or ever it would do for the purpose for which we intended it. Already it suffered a vast strain, as I discovered by placing my hand upon it; for, even to lift the slack of so great a length of line meant the stress of some tons.

Later I saw that the bo-sun was growing anxious for he went over to the rock around which he had made fast the rope, and examined the knots, and those places where he had parcelled it. After that he walked to the place where it went over the edge of the cliff, and here he made a further scrutiny; but came back presently, seeming not dissatisfied.

In a while the darkness came down upon us and we lighted our fires and prepared for the night, having the watches arranged the same as we had on the preceding nights.

CHAPTER IX

ABOARD THE HULK

WHEN it came to my watch, which I took in company with the big seaman, the moon had not yet risen. All the island was vastly dark, save the hilltop, from which the fires blazed in a score of places, and very busy they kept us, supplying them with fuel. When maybe the half of our watch had passed, the big seaman, who had been to feed the fires upon the weed side of the hill top, came across to me. He bade me come and put my hand upon the lesser rope; for that he thought they in the ship were anxious to haul it in so that they might send some message across to us. I asked him very anxiously whether he had perceived them waving a light, the which we had arranged to be our method of signalling in the night, in the event of such being needful.

He said that he had seen naught, and, by now, having come near to the edge of the cliff, I could see for myself, and so perceived that there was none signalling to us from the hulk.

To please the fellow, I put my hand upon the line, which we had made fast in the evening to a large piece of rock, and so, immediately, I discovered that something was pulling upon it, hauling and then slackening, so that it occurred to me that the people in the vessel might be indeed wishful to send us some message. To make sure, I ran to the nearest fire, and, lighting a tuft of weed, waved it thrice. But there came not any answering signal from those in the ship, and at that I went back to feel at the rope, to assure myself that it had not been the pluck of the wind upon it. I found that it was something very different from the wind, something that plucked with all the sharpness of a hooked

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fish, only that it had been a mighty great fish to have given such tugs. And so I knew that some vile thing out in the darkness of the weed was fast to the rope, and at this there came the fear that it might break it, and then a second thought that something might be climbing up to us along the rope. I bade the big seaman stand ready with his great cutlass, whilst I ran and waked the bo'sun.

I explained to him how that something meddled with the lesser rope, so that he came immediately to see for himself how this might be. When he had put his hand upon it, he bade me go and call the rest of the men, and let them stand around by the fires; for that there was something abroad in the night, and we might be in danger of attack. But he and the big seaman stayed by the end of the rope, watching, so far as the darkness would allow, and ever and anon feeling the tension upon it.

Suddenly, it came to the bo'sun to look to the second line, and he ran, cursing himself for his thoughtlessness. But because of its greater weight and tension, he could not discover for certain whether anything meddled with it or not. Yet he stayed by it, arguing that if aught touched the smaller rope then might something do likewise with the greater. Only, that the small line lay along the weed, whilst the greater one had been some feet above it when the darkness had fallen over us, and so might be free from any prowling creatures.

About an hour passed, and we kept watch and tended the fires, going from one to another. And, presently, coming to that one which was nearest to the bo'sun, I went over to him, intending to pass a few minutes in talk. But as I drew nigh to him, I chanced to place my hand upon the big rope, and at that I exclaimed in surprise; for it had become much slacker than when last I had felt it in the evening. I asked the bo'sun whether he had noticed it, whereat he felt the rope, and was almost more amazed than I had been. For when last he had touched it, it had been taut, and humming in the wind. Now, upon this discovery, he was in much fear that something had bitten through it.

THE next day in the early morning we were waked by one of the watchmen coming into the tent to call the bo'sun. It appeared that the hulk had moved in the night, so that its stern was now pointed somewhat toward the island. We ran all of us from the tent to the edge of the hill, and found it to be indeed as the man had said, and now I understood the reason of that sudden slackening of the rope. After withstanding the stress upon it for some hours, the vessel had at last yielded, and slewed its stern toward us, moving also to some extent bodily in our direction.

And now we discovered that a man in the lookout place in the top of the structure was waving a welcome to us, at which we waved back.

The bo'sun bade me haste and write a note to know whether it seemed to them likely that they might be able to heave the ship clear of the weed. When my letter was completed, we put it up in the little oilskin bag, and signalled to those in the ship to haul in upon the line. Yet, when they went to haul, there came a mighty splather amid the weed, and they seemed unable to gather in any of the slack, and then, after a certain pause, I saw the man in the look-out point to something. Immediately afterwards there belched out in front of him a little puff of smoke, and, presently, I caught the report of a musket, so that I knew that he was firing at something in the weed. He fired again, and yet once more, and after that they were able to haul in upon the line. And so I perceived that his fire had proved effectual; yet we had no knowledge of the thing at which he had fired.

Presently, they signalled to us to draw back the line, the which we could do only with great difficulty, and then the man in the top of the superstructure signed to us to vast hauling, which we did. He began to fire again into the weed, though with what effect we could not perceive. Then, in a while, he signalled to us to haul again, and now the rope came more easily; yet still with much labour, and a commotion in the weed over which it lay and, in places, sank. At last, as it cleared the weed because of the lift of the cliff, we saw that a great devil-fish had clutched it, and that we hauled it toward us; for the creature had too much obstinacy to let go.

Perceiving this, and fearing that the great weight of the devil-fish might divide the rope, the bo'sun caught up one of the men's lances, and ran to the cliff edge, calling to us to pull in gently, and put no more strain upon the line that need be. Hauling with great steadiness, we brought the monster near to the edge of the hill, and there, at a wave from the bo'sun stayed our pulling.

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Then he raised the spear, and smote at the creature's eyes and immediately it loosed its hold, and fell with a mighty splash into the water at the foot of the cliff. Then the bo'sun bade us haul in the rest of the rope, until we should come to the packet. In the meantime, he examined the line to see whether it had suffered harm; yet, beyond a little chafe, it was quite sound.

I opened and read the return letter, finding it to be written in the same feminine hand which had indited the others. From it we gathered that the ship had burst through a mass of the weed which had compacted itself about her, and that the second mate, who was the only officer remaining to them, thought there might be a good chance to heave the vessel out. It would have to be done with great slowness, so as to allow the weed to part gradually, otherwise the ship would but act as a gigantic rake to gather up weed before it, and so form its own barrier to clear water.

One of the men cried out then that they in the ship had commenced to heave again upon the big rope, and, for a time, I stood and watched it rise slowly, as it came to tautness.

Having tautened the rope so much as they thought proper, they left it to have its due effect upon the ship, and proceeded to attach a great block to it. Then they signalled to us to slack away on the little rope until they had the middle part of it. This they hitched around the neck of the block, and to the eye in the strop of the block they attached a bo'sun's chair, and so they had ready a carrier. By this means we were able to haul stuff to and from the hulk without having to drag it across the surface of the weed; being, indeed, the fashion in which we had intended to haul ashore the people in the ship.

But now we had the bigger project of salvaging the ship herself, and, further, the big rope, which acted as support for the carrier, was not yet of a sufficient height above the weed-continent for it to be safe to attempt to bring any ashore by such means. And now that we had hopes of saving the ship, we did not intend to risk parting the big rope, by trying to attain such a degree of tautness as would have been necessary at this time to have raised its bight to the height which we desired.

They in the hulk were obliged to heave twice upon the big rope to keep it off the weed, and by this we knew that the ship was indeed making a slow sternway toward the island—slipping steadily through the weed. And as we looked at her, later, it seemed almost that we could perceive that she was nearer. By evening it was clear that she had made a full thirty fathoms nearer.

THE next morning, to our huge pleasure, we discovered that the ship had made great progress in the night; being now so much nearer that none could suppose it a matter of imagination. She must have moved nigh sixty fathoms nearer to the island, so that now we seemed able almost to recognize the face of the man in the look-out. And many things about the hulk we saw with greater clearness, so that we scanned her with a fresh interest.

The man in the look-out waved a morning greeting to us, the which we returned very heartily, and, even as we did so, there came a second figure beside the man, and waved some white matter, perchance a handkerchief. We took off our head coverings, all of us, and shook them at the woman, and after this we went to our breakfast. After that the bo'sun dressed our hurts, and then, setting the man who had lost his fingers to watch, he took the rest of us, excepting him that was bitten in the arm, down to collect fuel, and so the time passed until near dinner.

When we returned to the hill top, the man upon the look-out told us that they in the ship had heaved not less than four separate times upon the big rope, the which, indeed, they were doing at that present minute. It was very plain to see that the ship had come nearer even during the short space of the morning. And so the bo'sun lashed me into the chair, with his own hands, and then signalled to those in the ship to haul upon the small rope; he, in the meanwhile, checking my descent toward the weed by means of our end of the hauling-line.

I came to the lowest part, where the bight of the rope dipped downward in a bow toward the weed, and rose again to the mizzen mast of the hulk. Here I looked downward with somewhat fearful eyes; for my weight on the rope made it sag somewhat lower than seemed to me comfortable, and I had very lively recollection of some of the horrors which that quiet surface hid. Yet I was not long in this place; for they in the ship, perceiving how the rope let me nearer to the weed than was safe, pulled very heartily upon the hauling-line, and so I came quickly to the hulk.

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AS I drew nigh to the ship, the men crowded upon a little platform which they had built in the superstructure somewhat below the broken head of the mizzen. Here they received me with loud cheers and very open arms. They were so eager to get me out of the bo'sun's chair, that they cut the lashings, being too impatient to cast them loose. They led me down to the deck, and here, before I had knowledge of aught else, a very buxom woman took me into her arms, kissing me right heartily, at which I was greatly taken aback. But the men about me did naught but laugh, and in a minute, she loosed me, and there I stood, not knowing whether to feel like a fool or a hero; but inclining rather to the latter.

There came a second woman, who bowed to me in a manner most formal, so that we might have been met in some fashionable gathering, rather than in a cast-away hulk in the lonesomeness and terror of that weed-choked sea. And at her coming all the mirth of the men died out of them, and they became very sober, whilst the buxom woman went backward for a piece, and seemed somewhat abashed. I was greatly puzzled, and looked from one to another to learn what it might mean; but in the same moment the woman bowed again, and said something in a low voice touching the weather. And after she raised her glance to my face, so that I saw her eyes, and they were so strange and full of melancholy, that I knew on the instant why she spoke and acted in so unmeaning a way; for the poor creature was out of her mind. And when I learnt afterwards that she was the captain's wife, and had seen him die in the arms of a mighty devil-fish, I grew to understand how she had come to such a pass.

After I had discovered the woman's madness, I was so taken aback as to be unable to answer her remark. But for this there appeared no necessity; for she turned away and went aft towards the saloon stairway, which stood open, and here she was met by a maid very bonny and fair, who led her tenderly down from my sight. In a minute, this same maid appeared, and ran along the decks to me, and caught my two hands, and shook them. She looked up at me with such roguish, playful eyes, that she warmed my heart, which had been strangely chilled by the greeting of the poor mad woman. She said many hearty things regarding my courage, to which I knew in my heart I had no claim. But I let her run on, and so, presently, coming more to possession of herself, she discovered that she was still holding my hands, the which, indeed, I had been conscious of the while with a very great pleasure. But at her discovery she dropped my hands with haste, and stood back from me a space. And so there came a little coolness into her talk; yet this lasted not long; for we were both of us young, and, I think, even thus early we attracted one the other.

PRESENTLY, the maid, whom I had learnt was niece to the captain's wife, and named Mary Madison, proposed to take me the round of the ship, to which proposal I agreed very willingly. But first I stopped to examine the mizzen stump, and the manner in which the people of the ship had stayed it, the which they had done very cunningly. I noted how that they had removed some of the superstructure from about the head of the mast, so as to allow passage for the rope, without putting a strain upon the superstructure itself.

The girl led me down on to the main-deck, and here I was very greatly impressed by the prodigious size of the structure which they had built about the hulk, and the skill with which it had been carried out, the supports crossing from side to side and to the decks in a manner calculated to give great solidity to that which they upheld. I was very greatly puzzled to know where they had gotten a sufficiency of timber to make so large a matter. But upon this point the girl satisfied me by explaining that they had taken up the 'tween decks, and used all such bulkheads as they could spare. And, further, there had been a good deal among the dunnage which had proved usable.

We came at last to the galley, and here I discovered the buxom woman to be installed as cook, and there were in with her a couple of fine children, one of whom I guessed to be a boy of maybe some five years, and the second a girl, scare able to do more than toddle. I asked Mistress Madison whether these were her cousins, but in the next moment I remembered that they could not be. For, as I knew, the captain had been dead some seven years. The woman in the galley informed me that they were hers.

She and the carpenter had gotten the second mate to read the marriage service over them.

Having made the round of the hulk, the captain's niece and I came aft again to

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the poop, and discovered that they were heaving once more upon the big rope, the which was very heartening, proving, as it did, that the ship was still a-move.

The girl left me, having to attend to her aunt. Whilst she was gone, the men came all about me, desiring news of the world beyond the weed-continent, and for the next hour I was kept very busy, answering their questions.

The second mate called out to them to take another heave upon the rope, and at that they turned to the capstan, and I with them, and we hove it taut again, after which they got about me once more, questioning; for so much seemed to have happened in the seven years in which they had been imprisoned. After awhile, I turned-to and questioned them on such points as I had neglected to ask Mistress Madison.

They discovered to me their terror and sickness of the weed-continent, its desolation and horror, and the dread which had beset them at the thought that they should all of them come to their ends without sight of their homes and countrymen.

About this time I became conscious that I had grown very empty; for I had come off to the hulk before we had made our dinner, and had been in such interest since, that the thought of food had escaped me. I had seen none eating in the hulk, they, without doubt, having dined earlier than my coming. But, being made aware of my state by the grumbling of my stomach, I inquired whether there was any food to be had at such a time. One of the men ran to tell the woman in the galley that I had missed my dinner, at which she made much ado, and set-to and prepared me a very good meal, which she carried aft and set out for me in the saloon, and after that she sent me down to it.

WHEN I had come near to being comfortable, there chanced a lightsome step upon the floor behind me, and, turning, I discovered that Mistress Madison was surveying me with a roguish and somewhat amused air. I got hastily to my feet; but she bade me sit down, and therewith she took a seat opposite, and so bantered me with a gentle playfulness that was not displeasing to me, and at which I played so good a second as I had ability. I fell to questioning her, and, among other matters, discovered that it was she who acted as scribe for the people in the hulk, at which I told her that I had done likewise for those on the island. After that, our talk became somewhat personal, and I learnt that she was near on to nineteen years of age, whereat I told her that I had passed my twenty-third.

And so we chatted on, until, presently, it occurred to me that I had better be preparing to return to the island, and I rose to my feet with this intention. I felt, though, that I had been very much happier to have stayed, the which I thought, for a moment, had not been displeasing to her, and this I imagined, noting somewhat in her eyes when I made mention that I must be gone. Yet it may be that I flattered myself.

When I came out on deck, they were busied again in heaving taut the rope, and, until they had made an end, Mistress Madison and I filled the time with such chatter as is wholesome between a man and maid who had not long met, yet find one another pleasing company.

When at last the rope was taut, I went up to the mizzen staging, and climbed into the chair, after which some of the men lashed me in very securely. Yet when they gave the signal to haul me to the island, there came for awhile no response, and then signs that we could not understand; but no movement to haul me across the weed. They unlashed me from the chair, bidding me get out, whilst they sent a message to discover what might be wrong. This they did, and, presently, there came back word that the big rope had stranded upon the edge of the cliff, and that they must slacken it somewhat at once. They did this, with many expressions of dismay.

And so maybe an hour passed, during which we watched the men working at the rope, just where it came down over the edge of the hill, and Mistress Madison stood with us and watched. It was very terrible, this sudden thought of failure (though it were but temporary) when they were so near to success.

At last there came a signal from the island for us to loose the hauling-line, which we did, allowing them to haul across the carrier, and so, in a little while, they signalled back to us to pull in, which, having done, we found a letter in the bag lashed to the carrier. In this the bo'sun made it plain that he had strengthened the rope, and placed fresh chafing gear about it, so that he thought it would be so safe as ever to heave upon; but to put it to a less strain. Yet he refused to allow

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me to venture across it, saying that I must stay in the ship until we were clear of the weeds. If the rope had stranded in one place, then had it been so cruelly tested that there might be some other points at which it was ready to give. And this final note of the bo'sun's made us all very serious; for, indeed, it seemed possible that it was as he suggested. Yet they reassured themselves by pointing out that, like enough, it had been the chafe upon the cliff edge which had frayed the strand, so that it had been weakened before it parted. But I, remembering the chafing gear which the bo'sun had put about it in the first instance, felt not so sure; yet I would not add to their anxieties.

So it came about that I was compelled to spend the night in the hulk; but as I followed Mistress Madison into the big saloon, I felt no regret, and had near forgotten already my anxiety regarding the rope.

And out on deck there sounded most cheerily the clack of the capstan.

CHAPTER X

FREED

WHEN Mistress Madison had seated herself, she invited me to do likewise, after which we fell into talk, first touching upon the matter of the standing of the rope, about which I hastened to assure her, and later to other things. Finally, as is natural enough with a man and maid, we talked about ourselves.

Presently, the second mate came in with a note from the bo'sun, which he laid upon the table for the girl to read, the which she beckoned me to do also.

I discovered that it was a suggestion, written very rudely and ill-spelt, that they should send us a quantity of reeds from the island, with which we might be able to ease the weed somewhat from around the stern of the hulk. To this the second mate desired the girl to write a reply, saying that we should be very happy for the reeds, and would endeavour to act upon his hint. This Mistress Madison did, after which she passed the letter to me, perchance I desired to send any message. I had naught that I wished to say, and so handed it back, with a word of thanks. The girl gave it to the second mate, who went, forthwith, and dispatched it.

Later, the stout woman from the galley came aft to set out the table, which occupied the centre of the large saloon.

I passed a while in answering the buxom woman's questions, and odd times such occasional ones as were slipt in by Mistress Madison. Then, suddenly, there came the clatter of men's feet overhead, and, later, the thud of something being cast down upon the deck, and so we knew that the reeds had come.

Mistress Madison cried out that we should go and watch the men try them upon the weed; for that if they proved of use in easing that which lay in our path, then should we come the more speedily to the clear water, and this without the need of putting so great a strain upon the hawser, as had been the case hitherto.

When we came to the poop, we found the men removing a portion of the superstructure over the stern, and after that they took some of the stronger reeds, and proceeded to work at the weed that stretched away in a line with our taffrail. That they anticipated danger, I perceived; for there stood by them two of the men and the second mate, all armed with muskets. These three kept a very strict watch upon the weed, knowing, through much experience of its terrors, how that there might be a need for their weapons at any moment.

AND so a while passed, and it was plain that the men's work upon the weed was having effect. The rope grew slack visibly, and those at the capstan had all that they could do, taking fleet and fleet with the tackle, to keep it anywhere near to tautness. Perceiving that they were kept so hard at it, I ran to give a hand, the which did Mistress Madison, pushing upon the capstan-bars right merrily and with heartiness.

The evening began to come down upon the lonesomeness of the weed-continent. Then there appeared the buxom woman, and bade us come to our suppers, and her manner of addressing the two of us was the manner of one who might have mothered us. But Mistress Madison cried out to her to wait, that we had found work to do. And at that the big woman laughed, and came toward us threateningly, as though intending to remove us hence by force.

There came a sudden interruption which checked our merriment; for, abruptly, there sounded the report of a musket in the stern, and then came shouts, and the noise of the two other weapons, seeming like thunder, being pent by the over-

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arching superstructure. And, directly, the men about the taffrail gave back, running here and there, and so I saw that great arms had come all about the opening which they had made in the superstructure. Two of these flicked in-board, searching hither and thither. But the stout woman took a man near to her, and thrust him out of danger, and after that, she caught Mistress Madison up in her big arms, and ran down on to the main-deck with her, and all this before I had come to a full knowledge of our danger.

But now I perceived that I should do well to get further back from the stern, the which I did with haste. Coming to a safe position, I stood and stared at the huge creature, its great arms, vague in the growing dusk, writhing about in vain search for a victim. Then returned the second mate, having been for more weapons, and now I observed that he armed all the men, and had brought up a spare musket for my use.

We commenced, all of us, to fire at the monster, whereat it began to lash about most furiously, and so, after some minutes, it slipped away from the opening and slid down into the weed. Upon that several of the men rushed to replace those parts of the superstructure which had been removed, and I with them. Yet there were sufficient for the job, so that I had no need to do aught. Thus, before they had made up the opening, I had been given chance to look out upon the weed, and so discovered that all the surface which lay between our stern and the island, was moving in vast ripples, as though mighty fish were swimming beneath it. And then, just before the men put back the last of the great panels I saw the weed all tossed up like to a vast pot a-boil, and then a vague glimpse of thousands of monstrous arms that filled the air, and came toward the ship.

The men had the panel back in its place, and were hasting to drive the supporting struts into their positions. When this was done, we stood awhile and listened, but there came no sound above that of the wail of the wind across the extent of the weed-continent.

I turned to the men, asking how it was that I could hear no sounds of the creatures attacking us, and so they took me up into the look-out place. And from there I stared down at the weed; but it was without movement, save for the stirring of the wind, and there was nowhere any sign of the devil-fish. Seeing me amazed, they told me how that anything which moved the weed seemed to draw them from all parts; but that they seldom touched the hulk unless there was something visible to them which had movement. Yet, as they went on to explain, there would be hundreds and hundreds of them lying all about the ship, hiding in the weed; but that, if we took care not to show ourselves within their reach, they would have gone most of them by the morning. This the men told me in a very matter-of-fact way; for they had become inured to such happenings.

Presently, I heard Mistress Madison calling to me by name, and so descended out of the growing darkness, to the interior of the superstructure. Here they had lit a number of rude, slush-lamps, the oil for which, I learned later, they obtained from a certain fish which haunted the sea, beneath the weed, in very large shoals, and took near any sort of bait with great readiness.

When I had climbed down into the light. I found the girl waiting for me to come to supper, for which I discovered myself to be in a mightily agreeable humour.

Having made an end of eating, she leaned back in her seat and commenced once more to bait me in her playful manner, the which appeared to afford her much pleasure, and in which I joined with no less. And so we fell presently to more earnest talk, and in this wise we passed a great space of the evening. Then there came to her a sudden idea, and what must she do but propose that we should climb to the look-out, and to this I agreed with a very happy willingness. And to the look-out we went. Now when we had come there, I perceived her reason for this freak; for away in the night, astern of the hulk, there blazed halfway between the heaven and the sea, a mighty glow, and suddenly, as I stared, being dumb with admiration and surprise, I knew that it was the blaze of our fires upon the crown of the bigger hill. All the hill being in shadow, and hidden by the darkness, there showed only the glow of the fires, hung, as it were, in the void, and a very striking and beautiful spectacle it was.

LATER, Mistress Madison showed me where I was to sleep, and after we had bid one another a very warm good-night, we parted, she going to see that her aunt was comfortable, and I out on the main-deck to have a chat with the man on watch. In this way, I passed the time until midnight, and in that while we had been forced

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to call the men thrice to heave upon the hawser, so quickly had the ship begun to make way through the weed. Then, having grown sleepy, I said good-night, and went to my berth, and so had my first sleep upon a mattress, for some weeks.

When the morning was come, I waked, hearing Mistress Madison calling upon me from the other side of my door, and rating me very saucily for a lie-a-bed. I made good speed at dressing, and came quickly into the saloon, where she had ready a breakfast, that made me glad I had waked. But first, before she would do aught else, she had me out to the look-out place, running up before me most merrily and singing in the fullness of her glee. When I had come to the top of the superstructure, I perceived that she had very good reason for so much merriment, and the sight which came to my eyes, gladdened me most mightily. Yet at the same time it filled me with a great amazement; for, behold! in the course of that one night we had made near unto two hundred fathoms across the weed, being now, with what we had made previously, no more than some thirty fathoms in from the edge of the weed.

And there stood Mistress Madison beside me, doing somewhat of a dainty step-dance upon the flooring of the look-out, and singing a quaint old lilt that I had not heard that dozen years. And this little thing, I think, brought back more clearly to me than aught else how that this winsome maid had been lost to the world for so many years, having been scarce of the age of twelve when the ship had been lost in the weed-continent.

As I turned to make some remark, being filled with many feelings, there came a hail from far above in the air, as it might be, and looking up, I discovered the men upon the hill to be standing along the edge, waving to us, and now I perceived how that the hill towered a very great way above us, seeming, as it were, to overhang the hulk, though we were yet some seventy fathoms distant from the sheer sweep of its nearer precipice.

Having waved back our greeting, we made down to breakfast, and, having come to the saloon, set-to upon the good victuals, and did very sound justice thereto.

After breakfast, hearing the clack of the capstan-pawls, we hurried out on deck and put our hands upon the bars, intending to join in that last heave which should bring the ship free out of her long captivity. And so for a time we moved round about the capstan, and I glanced at the girl beside me; for she had become very solemn. And indeed it was a strange and solemn time for her; for she, who had dreamed of the world as her childish eyes had seen it, was now, after many hopeless years, to go forth once more to it—to live in it, and to learn how much had been dreams, and how much real. And with all these thoughts I credited her, for they seemed such as would have come to me at such a time. And, presently, I made some blundering effort to show to her that I had understanding of the tumult which possessed her, and at that she smiled up at me with a sudden queer flash of sadness and merriment, and our glances met, and I saw something in hers, which was but new-born. And though I was but a young man, my heart interpreted it for me, and I was all hot suddenly with the pain and sweet delight of this new thing. I had not dared to think upon that which already my heart had made bold to whisper to me, so that even thus soon I was miserable out of her presence.

She looked downward at her hands upon the bar; and, in the same instant, there came a loud, abrupt cry from the second mate, to vast heaving, and at that all the men pulled out their bars and cast them upon the deck, and ran, shouting, to the ladder that led to the look-out. We followed, and so came to the top, and discovered that at last the ship was clear of the weed, and floating in the open water between it and the island.

At the discovery that the hulk was free, the men commenced to cheer and shout in a very wild fashion, as, indeed, is no cause for wonder, and we cheered with them. Then, suddenly, in the midst of our shouting, Mistress Madison plucked me by the sleeve, and pointed to the end of the island where the foot of the bigger hill jutted out in a great spur. And now I perceived a boat, coming round into view, and in another moment I saw that the bo'sun stood in the stern, steering; thus I knew that he must have finished repairing her whilst I had been on the hulk. By this, the men about us had discovered the nearness of the boat, and commenced shouting afresh, and they ran down, and to the bows of the vessel, and got ready a rope to cast.

When the boat came nearer, the men in her scanned us very curiously; but the bo'sun took off his head-gear, with a clumsy grace that well became him; at which Mistress Madison smiled very kindly upon him. And, after that, she told me with great frankness that he pleased her, and, more, that she had never seen so great a

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man, which was not strange, seeing that she had seen but few since she had come to years when men become of interest to a maid.

AFTER saluting us, the bo'sun called out to the second mate that he would tow us round to the far side of the island, and to this the officer agreed. He was, I surmised, by no means sorry to put some solid matter between himself and the desolation of the great weed-continent. And so, having loosed the hawser, which fell from the hill top with a prodigious splash, we had the boat ahead, towing. In this wise, we opened out, presently, the end of the hill. But feeling now the force of the breeze, we bent a kedge to the hawser, and, the bo'sun carrying it seawards, we warped ourselves to windward of the island, and here, in forty fathoms, we vast heaving, and rose to the kedge.

When this was accomplished they called to our men to come aboard, and this they did, and spent all of that day in talk and eating; for those in the ship could scarce make enough of our fellows. And then, when it had come night, they replaced that part of the superstructure which they had removed from about the head of the mizzen-stump. And so, all being secure, each one turned-in and had a full night's rest, which many of them needed.

The following morning, the second mate had a consultation with the bo'sun, after which he gave the order to commence upon the removal of the great superstructure, and to this each one of us set himself with vigour. It was a work requiring some time, and near five days had passed before we had the ship stripped clear. When this had been accomplished, there came a busy time of routing out various matter of which we should have need in jury rigging her; for they had been so long in disuse, that none remembered where to look for them. At this a day and a half was spent, and after that we set-to about fitting her with such jury-masts as we could manage from our material.

After the ship had been dismasted, all those seven years gone, the crew had been able to save many of her spars, these having remained attached to her, through their inability to cut away all of the gear. And though this had put them in sore peril, at the time, of being sent to the bottom with a hole in their side, yet now had they every reason to be thankful; for, by this accident, we had now a foreyard, and topsail-yard, a main t'gallant-yard, and the fore-topmast. They had saved more than these; but had made use of the smaller spars to shore up the superstructure, sawing them into lengths for that purpose. Apart from such spars as they had managed to secure, they had a spare topmast lashed along under the larboard bulwarks, and a spare t'gallant and royal-mast lying along the starboard side.

The second mate and the bo'sun set the carpenter to work upon the spare topmast, bidding him make for it some trestle-trees and bolsters, upon which to lay the eyes of the rigging; but they did not trouble him to shape it. Further, they ordered the same to be fitted to the fore-topmast and the spare t'gallant and royal-mast. And in the meanwhile, the rigging was prepared, and when this was finished, they made ready the shears to hoist the spare topmast, intending this to take the place of the main lower-mast.

When the carpenter had carried out their orders, he was set to make three partners with a step cut in each, these being intended to take the heels of the three masts. When these were completed, they bolted them securely to the decks at the fore part of each one of the stumps of the three lower-masts. And so, having all ready, we hove the main-mast into position, after which we proceeded to rig it. When we had made an end of this, we set-to upon the foremast, using for this the fore-topmast which they had saved, and after that we hove the mizzen-mast into place, having for this the spare t'gallant and royal-mast.

The manner in which we secured the masts, before ever we came to the rigging of them, was by lashing them to the stumps of the lower-masts. And after we had lashed them, we drove dunnage and wedges between the masts and the lashings, thus making them very secure. And so, when we had set up the rigging, we had confidence that they would stand all such sail as we should be able to set upon them.

The bo'sun bade the carpenter make wooden caps of six inch oak, these caps to fit over the *squared* heads of the lower-mast stumps, and having a hole, each of them, to embrace the jury-mast. And by making these caps in two halves, they were abled to bolt them on after the masts had been hove into position.

Having gotten in our three jury lower-masts, we hoisted up the foreyard to the main, to act as our mainyard, and did likewise with the topsail-yard to the fore. And after that, we sent up the t'gallant-yard to the mizzen. Thus we had her

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sparred, all but a bowsprit and jibboom; yet this we managed by making a stumpy, spike bowsprit from one of the smaller spars which they had used to shore up the superstructure, and because we feared that it lacked strength to bear the strain of our fore and aft stays, we took down two hawsers from the fore, passing them in through the hawse-holes and setting them up there. And so we had her rigged, and, after that, we bent such sail as our gear abled us to carry, and in this wise had the hulk ready for sea.

The time that it took us to rig the ship, and fit her out, was seven weeks, saving one day.

In all this time we suffered no molestation from any of the strange habitants of the weed-continent; though this may have been because we kept fires of dried weed going all the night about the decks, these fires being lit on big flat pieces of rock which we had gotten from the island. Yet, for all that we had not been troubled, we had more than once discovered strange things in the water swimming near to the vessel. But a flare of weed, hung over the side, on the end of a reed, had sufficed always to scare away such unholy visitants.

At last we came to the day on which we were in so good a condition that the bo'sun and the second mate considered the ship to be in a fit state to put out to sea—the carpenter having gone over so much of her hull as he could get at, and found her everywhere very sound; though her lower parts were hideously overgrown with weed, barnacles and other matters. Yet this we could not help, and it was not wise to attempt to scrape her, having consideration to the creatures which we knew to abound in those waters.

In those seven weeks Mistress Madison and I had come very close to one another, so that I had ceased to call her by any name save Mary, unless it were a dearer one than that; though this would be one of my own invention, and would leave my heart too naked did I put it down here.

Of our love one for the other, I think yet, and ponder how that mighty man, the bo'sun, came so quickly to a knowledge of the state of our hearts; for he gave me a very sly hint one day that he had a sound idea of the way in which the wind blew. And yet, though he said it with a half-jest, methought there was something wistful in his voice, as he spoke, and at that I just clapt my hand in his, and he gave it a very huge grip. And after that he ceased from the subject.

WHEN the day came on which we made to leave the nearness of the island, and the waters of that strange sea, there was great lightness of heart among us, and we went very merrily about such tasks as were needful. And so, in a little, we had the kedge tripped, and had cast the ship's head to starboard. And presently, we had her braced up upon the larboard tack, the which we managed very well; though our gear worked heavily; as might be expected. And after we had gotten under way, we went to the lee side to witness the last of that lonesome island, and with us came the men of the ship. And so, for a space, there was a silence among us; for they were very quiet, looking astern and saying naught; but we had sympathy with them, knowing somewhat of those past years.

Now the bo'sun came to the break of the poop, and called down to the men to muster aft, the which they did, and I with them; for I had come to regard them as my very good comrades. And rum was served out to each of them, and to me along with the rest, and it was Mistress Madison herself who dipped it out to us from the wooden bucket, though it was the buxom woman who had brought it up to us from the lazarette.

After the rum, the bo'sun bade the crew to clear up the gear about the decks, and get matters secured, and at that I turned to go with the men, having become so used to work with them. But he called to me to come up with him upon the poop, the which I did. And there he spoke respectfully, remonstrating with me, and reminding me that now there was need no longer for me to toil; for that I was come back to my old position of passenger, such as I had been in the *Glen Carrig*, ere she foundered.

But to this talk of his, I made reply that I had as good a right to work my passage home as any other among us; for though I had paid for a passage in the *Glen Carrig*, I had done no such thing regarding the *Seabird*—this being the name of the hulk—and to this, my reply, the bo'sun said little but I perceived that he liked my spirit.

And so, from thence until we reached the Port of London, I took my turn and part in all seafaring matters, having become by this quite proficient in the calling. Yet, in one matter, I availed myself of my former position; for I chose to live aft, and by this was abled to see much of my sweetheart, Mistress Madison.

After dinner upon the day on which we left the island, the bo'sun and the second

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mate picked the watches, and thus I found myself chosen to be in the bo'sun's, at which I was mightily pleased. And when the watches had been picked, they had all hands to 'bout ship, the which, to the pleasure of all, she accomplished. For under such gear and with so much growth upon her bottom, they had feared that we should have to veer, and by this we should have lost much distance to leeward. We desired to edge so much to windward as we could, being anxious to put space between us and the weed-continent.

Twice more that day we put the ship about, though the second time it was to avoid a great bank of weed that lay floating athwart our bows. For all the sea to windward of the island, so far as we had been able to see from the top of the higher hill, was studded with floating masses of the weed, like unto thousands of islets, and in places like to far-spreading reefs. And, because of these the sea all about the island remained very quiet and unbroken, so that there was never any surf, no, nor scarce a broken wave upon its shore, and this, for all that the wind had been fresh for many days.

WHEN the evening came, we were again upon the larboard tack, making, perhaps, some four knots in the hour; though, had we been in proper rig, and with a clean bottom, we had been making eight or nine, with so good a breeze and so calm a sea. Yet, so far, our progress had been very reasonable; for the island lay maybe some five miles to leeward, and about fifteen astern. And so we prepared for the night.

A little before dark, we discovered that the weed-continent trended out towards us; so that we should pass it, maybe, at a distance of something like half a mile. Thus it chanced that, coming abreast of the point during our time of watching, we peered very earnestly to leeward; for the night was dark, having no moon until nearer the morning; and we were full of unease in that we had come so near again to the desolation of that strange continent. And then, suddenly, the man with me clutched my shoulder, and pointed into the darkness upon our bow, and thus I discovered that we had come nearer to the weed than the bo'sun and the second mate had intended.

They, without doubt, had miscalculated our leeway.

I turned and sang out to the bo'sun that we were near to running upon the weed, and, in the same moment, he shouted to the helmsman to luff, and directly afterwards our starboard side was brushing against the great outlying tufts of the point.

For a breathless minute, we waited.

The ship drew clear, and so into the open water beyond the point; but I had seen something as we scraped against the weed, a sudden glimpse of white, gliding among the growth. And then I saw others, and in a moment, I was down on the main-deck, and running aft to the bo'sun. Midway along the deck a horrid shape came above the starboard rail, and I gave out a loud cry of warning.

Then I had a capstan-bar from the rack near, and smote with it at the thing, crying all the while for help, and at my blow the thing went from my sight, and the bo'sun was with me, and also some of the men.

The bo'sun had seen my stroke, and so sprang upon the t'gallant rail, and peered over; but gave back on the instant, shouting to me to run and call the other watch, for that the sea was full of the monsters swimming off to the ship. And at that I was away at a run, and when I had waked the men, I raced aft to the cabin and did likewise with the second mate, and so returned in a minute, bearing the bo'sun's cutlass, my own cut-and-thrust, and the large lantern that hung always in the saloon.

When I had gotten back, I found all things in a mighty scurry—men running about in their shirts and drawers, some in the galley bringing fire from the stove, and others lighting a fire of dry weed to leeward of the galley. And along the starboard rail there was already a fierce fight, the men using capstan-bars, even I had done.

I thrust the bo'sun's cutlass into his hand, and at that he gave a great shout, part of joy, and part of approbation. And after that he snatched the lantern from me, and had run to the larboard side of the deck, before I was well aware that he had taken the light—but now I followed him, and happy it was for all of us in the ship that he had thought to at that moment. For the light of the lantern showed me the vile faces of three of the weed men climbing over the larboard rail.

The bo'sun had cleft them or ever I could come near; but in a moment I was full busy; for there came nigh a dozen heads above the rail a little aft of where I was.

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I ran at them, and did some good execution; but some had been aboard; if the bo'sun had not come to my help. And now the decks were full of light, several fires having been lit, and the second mate having brought out fresh lanterns; and now the men had gotten their cutlasses, the which were more handy than the capstan-bars. The fight went forward, some having come over to our side to help us, and a very wild sight it must have seemed to any onlooker.

All about the decks burned the fires and the lanterns, and along the rails ran the men, smiting at hideous faces that rose in dozens into the wild glare of our fighting lights. And everywhere drifted the stench of the brutes. Up on the poop, the fight was as brisk as elsewhere; and here, having been drawn by a cry for help, I discovered the buxom woman smiting with a gory meat-axe at a vile thing which had gotten a clump of its tentacles upon her dress. But she had dispatched it, or ever my sword could help her. And then, to my astonishment, even at that time of peril, I discovered the captain's wife, wielding a small sword, and the face of her was like to the face of a tiger. Her mouth was drawn, and showed her teeth clenched; but she uttered no word nor cry, and I doubt not but that she had some vague idea that she worked her husband's vengeance.

FOR a space I was as busy as any, and afterwards I ran to the buxom woman to demand the whereabouts of Mistress Madison.

In a very breathless voice, the woman informed me that she had locked her in her room out of harm's way, and at that I could have embraced the woman; for I had been sorely anxious to know that my sweetheart was safe.

Presently the fight diminished, and so, at last, came to an end, the ship having drawn well away from the point, and being now in the open. And after that I ran down to my sweetheart, and opened her door. She wept, having her arms about my neck; for she had been in sore terror for me, and for all the ship's company. But, soon, drying her tears, she grew indignant with her nurse for having locked her into her room, and refused to speak to that good woman for near an hour. Yet I pointed out to her that she could be of very great use in dressing such wounds as had been received in the fight.

She came back to her usual brightness, and brought out bandages, and lint, and ointment, and thread, and was presently very busy.

It was later that there rose a fresh commotion in the ship; for it had been discovered that the captain's wife was amissing.

Immediately then, the bo'sun and the second mate instituted a search. But she was nowhere to be found, and indeed, none in the ship ever saw her again, at which it was presumed that she had been dragged over by some of the weed men, and so come upon her death. And at this, there came a great prostration to my sweetheart, so that she would not be comforted for the space of nigh three days, by which time the ship had come clear of those strange seas, having left the incredible desolation of the weed-continent far under our starboard counter.

After a voyage which lasted for nine and seventy days since getting under weigh, we came to the Port of London, having refused all offers of assistance on the way.

I had to say farewell to my comrades of so many months and perilous adventures; yet, being a man not entirely without means, I took care that each of them should have a certain gift by which to remember me.

And I placed monies in the hands of the buxom woman, so that she should have no reason to stint my sweetheart, and she having—for the comfort of her conscience—taken her good man to be properly married at the church, set up a little house upon the borders of my estate.

But this happened not until Mistress Madison had come to take her place at the head of my hall in the County of Essex.

One further thing there is of which I must tell. Should any, chancing to trespass upon my estate, come upon a man of very mighty proportions, albeit somewhat bent by age, seated comfortably at the door of his little cottage, then shall they know him for my friend the bo'sun. For to this day do he and I foregather, and let our talk drift to the desolate places of this earth, pondering upon that which we have seen—the weed-continent, where reigns desolation and the terror of its strange habitants. And, after that, we talk softly of the land where God hath made monsters after the fashion of trees. Then, maybe, my children come about me, and so we change to other matters; for the little ones love not terror.

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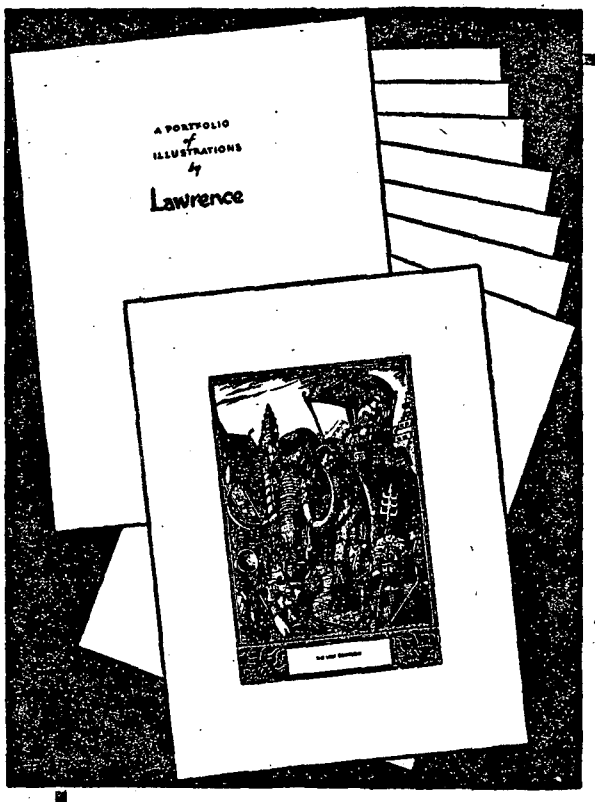

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EVEN A WORM

By J. S. Bradford

"It is enough," said the quiet voice. "From to-day the blood pact is on you all. From the worm to the elephant, you are all blood brothers. The troth is sworn, and the enemy is Man."

CHAPTER ONE

AT ABOUT ten minutes past five in the afternoon of one perfect day in earliest autumn, Sir Francis Gordon, second baronet, a rather stern, short, stocky little man, fifty or so years old, with a cynically smiling eye and a grim chin, let himself gently down into the depths of an armchair, in a shooting lodge in Sutherland, and chuckled to himself.

It had been a good day. Two hundred and twelve brace; and for the second time over that constituted a record. Outside his study door, in the lounge, were the members of his household party, also heavily seated in armchairs and supping hot tea laced with whisky.

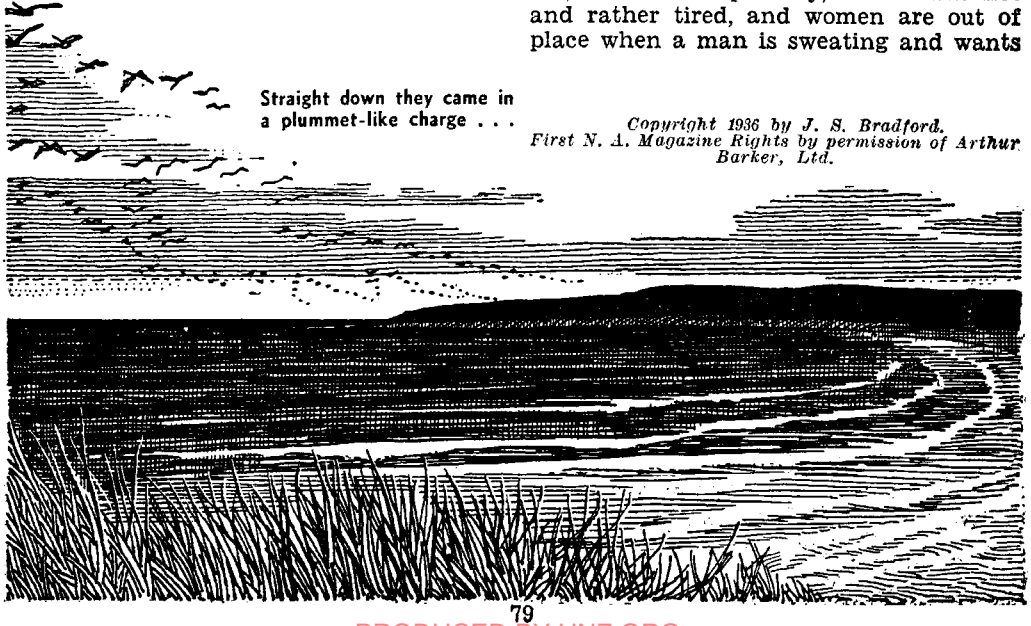
He could visualize their talk; old Jefferson, the walk would have reduced his ponderous belly an inch, explaining why he had blazed into thin air miles behind a small pack that swung down-hill over the line of butts at the third drive and failed to bring down anything.

Peters, of Peters, Anakin & Co., metal merchants, who had cleaned up a bundle in tin and oddly enough for a tin merchant, shot satisfactorily and cleanly.

Young Fotheringay would be there, too; lazing, leg over leg, Brigade moustache twitching over his upper lip, mute about his own prowess and everything else in the world, but just stammering in the most ultra-Ponsonby tones: "Aw yes, devilish good show, undoubtedly," or words to that effect.

The rest of the party he dismissed from his mind. Tennyson was just Tennyson, a good fellow but an appalling shot. Lionel Carver—well, after all, he and Lionel had known each other for centuries it seemed, and Lionel happened to be his friend.

The women of the party he discounted, too, at least temporarily, for he was hot and rather tired, and women are out of place when a man is sweating and wants



Straight down they came in a plummet-like charge . . .

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to stretch his legs in front of a fire.

There was one thing, though, that he could not discount. He wondered idly, for a moment, why it pressed on his mind.

Somewhere on the near side of Suiel Dearg he had pulled down two birds from a covey of wind-swept grouse before him and changing guns perfectly, had pipped a third, the wind twisting her nut-brown tails askew, so that she fell almost a clear eighty yards behind the butt.

"Damn!" said Francis Gordon quietly to himself. "We picked the first two up clean as be-sugared, and we ought to have found the third. She was hard-hit, I know, but there was devilish little scent for Mick to work on and the heather as thick as virgin forest. Ah well, it can't he helped—I hate like hell though, leaving a wounded bird about."

The black-coated figure of Roberts, the butler, sidled into the room, placed a silver tea-tray by Sir Francis Gordon's side and said: "I have taken the liberty of placing a small decanter on the tray, sir. A little whisky in your tea, sir, if you will excuse me, is very good if you're tired.

"You mother me, Roberts. Thanks all the same. By the way, I don't want to be disturbed, nor any calls put through to me until a quarter to seven when I go up to change. If anyone comes through put them off."

"Even the *Daily Flare*, sir?"

"Oh, the *Daily Flare* will be ringing up in any case. Mr. Calverley Dexter, the editor, will be coming through at six forty-five. Until then, though, I'm going to take it easy." And as Roberts moved across to the door: "You know, being a so-called millionaire isn't a sinecure, Roberts, but being a newspaper proprietor can be hell sometimes. Down, you old rascal, down." This to Prince, a shaggy giant of a deerhound, who had lolloped from the side of an open fireplace and was stretching a grizzled, questing nose at the tea-tray.

IT WAS about ten minutes past five of the clock on the same day in the month of September that three other events happened which are of profound interest.

A hot, sweating man (he had been harvesting all day and the beer had been potent) swung into the door of a country cottage in Suffolk, tumbled over a lurcher, blasphemed, and kicked sideways. The kick was misplaced and broke a shoulder instead of bruising a stern. The dog howled once and then gazed piteously at its master.

Two hundred miles to the west a jockey, his whole future dependent upon it, laced a beaten two-year-old home over its wrong distance—the trainer was at fault, but in a race where the owner had backed it for hundreds—and in doing so he broke a heart; not a human one, so there were no words said.

And, at the same time, in a private slaughter yard in Staffordshire, a heavily muscled man struck once at the head of a bullock, saw it totter, stagger, and then rise again from its knees. Said: "Blast you, won't you keep still!" Struck again and then a moment afterwards kicked the helpless corpse with his foot. "Another bloody day's work done," he said, and walked home to eat pressed beef, stale bread and fresh butter served by a comely wife whom he kissed on greeting and called "Milly."

* * *

They have been called The Isles of Illusion—or The Pleasant Isles of Aves. They are of this world—yet not of it. It all depends on the mood of the individual—and the state of his mind.

But they are as essentially real—as is the feeling that makes a man twist round suddenly when the shadows thicken in a country lane—that causes a little cluster of oaks on a hillside to be shunned by man and beast alike—or that labels places in the matter-of-fact world of today as unkind, fey, or lonely.

And the adjectives do not refer to the natural beauty or the perfection of the spots concerned.

Few people may find the Isles, though, for the road is long, and the traveller must strip himself of the garments of civilization and wear instead the cloak of simplicity and the sandals of what we called fantasy. And his dreams and his thoughts must be pure and Mother Nature must have taken hold of his heart.

But in those Isles—if you may find the way—is a place that knows no trespassing; a still place so gaily green of grass that it were shame for even the lightest of mortal feet to tread on it. And in that place sat a little figure—elfish—Puck-like—whose cloven feet tapped noisily on the grey slab stone of a tumbled fountain and who listened, and nodded, and shook his head at the whispered words of four supplicants.

The four were kings in their own way, the Eagle, the Lion, the Whale, and the Cobra—and as kings they said their say—pleading each for his subjects.

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Its purport was the same.

"Oh, Father, Pan, come back to us; help us. In the years of long ago Man was as we are, simple, unwise, but little to be feared, no more than our kin must fear each other—as the weak must fear the stronger. Today, though, he had enchained Nature, captured the elements. Where once he killed once, and for necessity, now he mangles a thousandfold—for luxury."

"He has snared the beasts of my kingdom," urged the lion. "Turned some so that they obey him. Preserved some so that he may torture them; armed himself so that. . . ."

"He cannot be hurt and yet may kill all," said the quiet voice of the "Master."

"Us he shoots as carrion, or rears to shoot as sport," chuckled the eagle.

"A tight line and a frying pan," galumphed the whale, "is the lot of my inferiors. Me he is blissfully exterminating so that his women may bare their backs and rub our life-blood on them to be burned brown, or else pour our veins down their throats to build up their own puny bodies. Pah!"

"And you," said the same quiet voice to the snake.

"Handbags, shoes, and umbrella handles. I own, illustrious protector, that we may have been ungenerous in our actions with man, but only when disturbed, I assure you, only when trodden on, irritated, confounded."

"It is enough," said the same quiet voice. "From to-day the blood pact is on you all from the worm to the elephant. You are all blood brothers. The troth is sworn and the enemy is man.

"There are four ways," continued the quiet voice, "that we can strike at man. Fear first!"

"Fear," coughed the lion. "My brother, the tiger, and I can instil that in a few."

"And we, blood brother," sighed the cobra, "are not a few, and can help you that way. When may we strike?"

"Actual death," said the voice. A rumble from the lion, a soft sibilant hiss from the snake and a spew of "My brother the shark," from the whale.

"Starvation. Ah," from all four.

"Disease!" Four forms shrivelled to mute inactivity as the quiet voice continued:

"Children, brothers all, go rest to-night. There is so much to be planned. The word to be spread: commands to be given: discipline to be taught: rules to be laid down and obeyed.

"Do you know how man wages war? He draws out plans not a day but ten thousand days in advance. He appoints his commanders-in-chief, his general, his staff, his pawns. He ignores no opening, no eventuality. He is more ruthless than the tiger, my good lion, who is long in the tooth, more cunning than the snake, more cold-blooded than the fish, more farseeing than the dwellers in the heavens. Some he sacrifices purposely, so that they may break the gateway to success. Some he sacrifices needlessly, so that glory may be his—in this we do not follow him. But when man begins, he continues to the bitter end. He uses all his subjects from the lowest to the highest, the most foolish to the most cunning, and we, blood brothers all, may take a leaf from his book and, indeed, improve on it."

* * *

It was a dark night and a hot night and very still. But the lap on an oily sea against concrete blocks, the creak of a swaying derrick, and the whirr of voices from fat passengers' fatter cabins, helped to drown the soft patter of feet, a slither and scuffle there, and a soft, at times ir-

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ritated, little squeaking of infant voices.

Under the lee of a store-house, a little figure, brown bodied, beady eyed, and glistening of nose, two white-fanged teeth showing under a curled lip, stood on his haunches and addressed a score or so of similar figures.

His name was Heracles, and only the stars overhead and the wide ears of the wind heard his words.

"You have your orders."

"Chitter-chatter, chitter-chatter," came the answer.

"You, Titus, to the *Andromeci.* You pick your men up at the bastion by E berth. You know the way of old to get aboard. Remember, though, all is different from now on. We obey orders and we. . . ."

"Work together, each for all," chittered Titus, a ring of red glowing rounder in a pair of luminous eyes. "Good night, chief, and good hunting. We may never meet again."

"We never will, Titus, but the reward will be all the sweeter."

"Thomas," chuckled Heracles, "you have always had a sense of humour since that Yankee sailor tried to stun you with a stick and hit his own cur dog—the Master pardon me now for the word 'cur'—as you jinked behind the door.

"The *Abraham Lincoln* is by the east jetty. You and your fellows to her and remember that though The Day is not yet we have the preliminary work to do and on us rests much. Away. In a month you should be in San Francisco."

"And you, Heracles?"

"Dead. But the work will have started."

The little figure of Heracles bristled suddenly as a bell tolled in the night. "Away, all of you. You know your ships, and posts, and duties. Marcus to the *Yangtse Maru.* Charles to the *Indianapolis.* Shivrani, sweetheart, stop love-making now, your loving days are ended. Lead your family and all their families to the *Runnymede.*" He sighed slightly. "Almost I envy you. At least you will have fun before the end and will add to your education."

"Education," whispered a she-rat in sibilant tones.

"Surely. She is packed with women, 'going home' they call it, to escape the hot weather; and young men, 'officers' they call them, too, all soft of speech and hard of body going home, too, on leave. Oh, queen of sweethearts go quickly, lest you lose some little of the learning of the art that your sex alone knows.

"But, remember, a woman first. It strikes fear more. But not too soon. It were better not to begin too soon. Not till they see the cliffs of home before them. It hurts more then."

"Brother," whispered another voice. "I stink of it already. I tremble."

"Then quickly, heart of my heart, to the water tanks of your ship and die there like the Master would have you die."

The last rat scampered away into the night. Heracles stood on hind legs a minute, stretched fore-legs and muscles, scrubbed his whiskers, and grinned at the blinking lights from a port-hole across the quay.

"Hey-day, I have steeped myself in it, too, and the eye of Pushtu, the Bheestie, who had died from 'it' was not good eating, but then, neither shall I be good company for long. Who goes there?"

"Friend, brother, friend," and a lithe shape, scarce six inches long, slithered, belly to earth, up to Heracles's side, raised itself, and a pair of eyes with the wisdom of all eternity in them smiled on Heracles.

"I had forgotten thee, my Brother Krait," chirped Heracles. "Your tribe are bound for. . . ."

"The cargo boats," the snake sighed happily. "They are indeed a fortunate species, these humans. They have built themselves 'ships,' I believe is the right word, is it not? to carry themselves and their goods, 'cargoes' surely is the word, from one world to the other. What happy cargoes they may carry. Fruit and grain and rice and all things warm to rest in but easy to wake from."

"Goes the word all the world round for you, too," chattered Heracles.

"The world round. My education has been shockingly neglected, but in bundles of dates, bales of melons, baskets of figs, bunches of bananas. . . .!"

"Good eating bananas," interrupted Heracles suddenly.

"But not such good finding, brother. Do you remember the old days, the days before the pact? How easy it was for one so small as me to lay hidden asleep, from one so light of step, so quick of eye as you and yet—and yet, oh brother, one such as you—his feet touched me once, not with intention, and I, such is my nature, roused and struck him. Not in anger, but in petulance; and I do not strike in vain.

"Think, then Oh Heracles, of a fat hand, a hand like that of the man in the house on the Bund who killed my wife, think of his hand stretching down to grasp a

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bundle in which I rest asleep, but ever awake—and, oh- brother, though I kill quickly, there is pain in it."

"There is pain in all death," muttered Heracles. "Much pain in the one such as I must die. Tell me, are you never afraid of death?"

"All of us are, but man is far more afraid. Ssh!"

A clatter of feet sounded on the concrete blocks; a pleasant voice said: "Well, it was a hell of a good dinner, and damn good to see you again, old man. You sail to-morrow afternoon, don't you? God! I envy you."

"It's not all beer and skittles," answered another voice. "I see a devilish sight less of my home than you do."

"Yes, but you get home, home to England regularly, don't you?"

"Undoubtedly. But with red-tape, refuelling, re-victualling, pacifying directors and penniless shareholders, a merchant skipper's life is no sinecure these days."

"Still, you get home and you're taking old Bunface back with you."

"My dear Toby, for a major on the staff your designation of the Viceroy borders on the side of levity. Well, so long. It's good of you to see me on board."

Heracles's eyes, grey as the night, turned to the friend by his side.

"You have heard and you will know where I go."

"Ssso, brother mine, I will come with you. I am King of my clan and they have their orders, but I will come with you and alone. We may have, as your viceroy says (have I not heard him speaking privately myself?): 'one hell of a time' before it is all over. And besides. . . ."

"Besides what?"

"I happen to know that his wife, her Ladyship, goes home with him."

* * *

Tom Slowly had goggly eyes and a spotty face. He also had a rather greasy wife, four children, and a D. C. M. won for conspicuous gallantry at Passchendaele. He had had a secondary school education, but, from the point of view of his job, he had a brain second to none. His job was chief sub-editor of the *Daily Flare,* and he held it brilliantly, simply because he had a nose and a brain—the two are not always synonymous in journalism—which together enabled him to smell out some unexciting piece of copy and redesign it so that the next day it staggered two million readers with its sheer sensationalism.

It was a dull night, close on eight o'clock. Stories had flopped and fallen down, and the paper, in Tom's words, "prophesied to be a shade lousier than ever."

Then MacIntyre, whose job it was to sort out an overflowing basket of agency copy, came across to him.

"Here's something that might do to work up. A stevedore killed by a snake when unloading bananas at Cardiff docks."

"Who the hell cares about a stevedore these days!" said Tom. "Make a top of it, though, and get somebody to write two hundred and fifty words on how the hell snakes get over here and why the hell a stock of anti-virene isn't kept at every port. We want to hit somebody in the leader column tonight, anyway. Also, I'm going out to eat now. I'll be back by nine, but if nothing else has happened then we'll plan page one with old Blastabrooke's speech on international emancipation of women as a lead. And a poor lead it is, too."

Tom Slowly was back in the office before nine. MacIntyre sent a boy running out for him and he came, cursing, his mouth full of beer and toasted cheese.

"What the hell is up?" he said.

"For you to decide, but it seems a whale of a story.

"Jones of Southampton has phoned through that two men have died from snake bite when unloading a cargo from British Guiana. Another fellow has hopped it the same way from Liverpool, two at Dundee when unloading jute, and a fellow has passed out, his back like a half-hoop, at Immingham, when unload teak from Burma."

"Thank God there is some news at last," said Tom Slowly. "Make it up into the lead while I see the editor. There aren't any women killed, are there? No? Hell! Women—sex—make a better appeal than mere men. You've sent out on it, of course?"

"Jones, who is acting night news editor," said MacIntyre, "has gone out himself. We're short of reporters tonight. He has gone down to the docks, chancing his arm on meeting some deckhand who can suggest a really fantastical story on the plague of snakes."

"Much bloody hope he has," said Tom, and wandered out through a mess of tables, most of them empty, the derelicts of a newspaper reporter's day's work.

IT IS some slight tussle, putting a newspaper to bed. In other words, finally approving of that front page which is to

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revivify, vilify, and finally confound some two million readers on the morrow.

Tom Slowly stood by the stone in the composing room, finally regarding page one of his construction. He saw it in proof and in leaded type, while large, but amazingly artistic hands dealt with corrections to be made in the type, and slipped inches of moulded metal in place of inches where a comma had gone astray or an "l" become an "e."

"Pretty poor," said Tom, "to lead a paper with snakes, although we've all got them, I expect."

"Snakes," said the owner of the red hand, who was just dropping a slip of leaded corrected type into its right place, "Snakes. Gawd, Mr. Slowly, how I remember them when I was with the Bedfords in Indian in nineteen-twelve. Creepy-crawly things—now what the hell—sorry, Mr. MacIntyre."

"Tom," said MacIntyre, "hold up everything. Jones has just phoned through from the docks. The *Arrabudja's* docked there tonight. As she docked Lady Ramesby, the viceroy's 'missus,' was killed by a snake when she went down to finally pack her dressing-case."

"By the Saints, have we all got the jitters," shouted Tom, "or has the world gone mad? God! what a story!"

The riot that the *Daily Flare* started with its headlines screaming, ran like a prairie fire for a full week.

"Viceroy's Wife killed by Snake"

"Plague of Reptile Deaths"

Very erudite newspapers delivered themselves of leading articles and scientific theories and an obituary of Lady Ramesby that ran to a column and a half in most cases.

The less erudite papers sent reporters scuttling over the country and printed hitherto unknown and quite appalling portraits of the various deceased from early infancy upwards.

Only the *Daily Flare* was different. It hammered the government and it hammered the Office of Works and the Ministry of Health and the Board of Trade. It threw bricks at the Mercantile Marine and beautifully disembowelled the Port of London Authority. It even induced a noted cleric, whose proclivity for bursting into print was immense—they called him names that were indecent in Fleet Street—to unburden his soul of two thousand words on the plagues of Egypt and their relativity to modern life.

Then the wonder died; until a week later, a guarded report was issued that Lord Ramesby, Viceroy of India—home on six months' leave—who had been heart-broken by the tragic death of his wife and been taken ill after the funeral, was now reported to be in a grave condition, and that Sir Roger Blatherwick, the eminent authority on tropical diseases, had been called in consultation.

About the time this report was issued, the wife of a seaman lately of the *S. S. Arrabudja* came hurrying into the den of a panel doctor not a mile from the Customs House, shouting that "her man was lying groaning bad, was all blotchy, that he smelt something horrid, and was shouting that he had got the plague all from a dead rat wot he had found and thrown overboard when the *Arrabudja* docked, and that wouldn't Gawd take him quick?"

Nevinson, the doctor, raised incurious eyes, pulled on a coat and hat, and followed the woman. He had been practising there for a dozen years and was used to irregularities.

Even he, though, stopped when he saw the man, scribbled a hurried note, whispered a few words of command to the woman, saw her nod in understanding, and run helter-skelter out of the house. Then suddenly squaring his shoulders he bent over the almost lifeless figure, whispered to himself, "Bubonic, by God," and got on with his job.

It was probably needless heroism; no one could have got on with the job except an undertaker, but it had its indirect reward. For one moment the eyes opened before they shut forever, and tortured lips said: "It was a rat, half-dead, sir, in the viceroy's cabin wot was on the *Arrabudja*. I saw it stinkin' there when we was going over the ship after the old gal had been done in by the snake, scotched it and threw it overboard, but it all felt foul in my hand like a mess of maggots."

A hand rapped at the door outside a moment or so afterwards. Nevinson opened it inches, saw the blue-uniformed figure of a policeman outside, said: "No one's to enter here, officer. A man's just died with bubonic plague."

"God Almighty, sir!"

"His wife's gone for the medical officer of health. They'll isolate her in hospital. I've written telling them to. Keep everyone out, even including the medical officer of health, until I come back."

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Five minutes later Nevinson stood in the private office of the landlord of the Anchor and Crown while the landlord, face growing grimmer and grimmer, stood gaping at him.

Nevinson had known the landlord, old Tom Bowling, for a decade, and had helped to usher seven little Tom Bowlings into the world.

"Keep away from me, Tom, and listen, and keep this to yourself. I am going to use your phone, and afterwards I am going to take it away and burn it."

"What the hell, sir!"

"I've just left a man who died in my arms from plague. It's nothing to be alarmed about. There's no sense in running needless risks, though."

Nevinson took a pace forward, picked up the receiver, dialled a number, got it at once.

"Is that Sir Roger Blatherwick? My name is Nevinson. I'm a doctor in Tythe Street, near the Customs House. You, I know, have been called in to see Lord Ramesby. I am just telling you. . . ."

He told him quickly, heard Blatherwick whistle in surprise, and say "Thank you" to Nevinson, and add: "You, too, had better go round to the hospital as quick as you can I'll ring them. There may be no need for it, but you say he died in your arms. Well, precautions, always precautions." And heard his own voice saying back:

"Has Lord Ramesby got it?" and heard Blatherwick's answering voice:

"He had. He died two hours ago."

THE month of October died. November frost were riming the ploughland and pasture, and the last leaf was leaving the trees. There was heavy snow on the border hills, ice in the Fens, and a cutting wind to numb one's fingers in most of the lowland counties.

In Shropshire it was cold, just hard enough under foot to stop hunting, but a clear and crystal evening as old Martha Tibbits, cloak well wrapped around her, bass basket full of goods in her hand, turned down the lane from Cleobury that led to Tibbit's farm.

It was a long lane, thick with cropped, hollybush banks for the first half-mile that merged slowly into the outland scrub and cluster of larch, hazel, and birch which fringed the Wyre forest.

Martha always hated it, at least that part which stretched for nearly a mile through the fringe of the forest and then debouched into the pale green clearing where her home nestled in a patch of cider orchard and green grass.

She was later than usual that night. Had stopped, in fact, to sip two home-brewed sloe gins with Mother Evan Thomas of the Bardley Arms; but then lateness did not matter so much this evening, as she had said to Mrs. Thomas. "Tibbits has gone to Kidderminster market. He'll be late back, 'deed he will. Friends he meets and away he goes with them. God bless him though. Old as I be I love him for it, and a man's just your man for always if you love him truly. It's true he never comes back the real worse for liquor. Dull it is for him at the farm, I dare say, and—Lord have mercy, listen to the clock. 'Tis chiming six. Real dark outside it is, too, and I have a power of things to do before Sam Tibbits gets home."

Mother Tibbit's thoughts ran riot as she waddled down the lane. The moon was shining crystal overhead. Her bag kept knocking itself against the side of her leg and as it knocked it seemed to recall that Shropshire catch-rhyme of her youth in the home she sprang from.

Clunton and Clunbury, Clungunford
and Clun
Are the quietest places under the sun

"Quiet Clun was, indeed," she thought, "with the hills looking down on it and the distant heather purpling them in August, when I was a child, and half the folk Welsh and half English, and not mongrels as they are now. Quiet, but indeed not so quiet as this lane—whisht, away now! Had I stick with me I had killed 'e." She waved her bag at a rat that scuttled across her path and then dived into the dark nothingness of the bank.

And then the first hazel scrub of the forest stretched its arms out to her, and an owl whispered its first call, which is always a whisper, a soft "hoo-whoot"; and Mother Tibbits paddled along down the lane that loomed darker and darker as the slowly rising banks and trees blotched out the moon's light.

"Hate this, I always do and will," she said. " 'Tis dark and though I mean always to bring a torch or a lantern, never I do. Whit's that staring there? A glow-worm? Never in November. 'Way, 'n'way and away to you!" she shouted, and waved her bag at a faint twinkle of light that shone out from the darkness of the bank on her right. An owl hooted again in the

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stillness and a pheasant startled from its slumbers shouted its warning cry, "cack-cack, cack-cack," in the dark depths of an unseen world.

And suddenly Martha Tibbits felt really afraid. A little shiver, born in the base of her spine, crept slowly up to her neck and spread the while. "I'm cold. Lord, what is to do with me, but I'm afraid, too. Now go away you, go away."

A pair of phosphorescent eyes gleamed at her from the bank, blinked and gleamed again.

On her left side two pairs of eyes shone steadfastly and did not blink.

"Away," shouted Martha, and quickened her steps. There was no response save a perceptible slither and rustle that sounded in the banks and the darkness of undergrowth on either side. And then more tiny lights twinkled at her; a dozen pairs, perhaps, on her right, two score on her left, and in the distance she could see faint, evasive pin-points seemingly hustling towards her.

"What's to do?" shouted Martha, querulously. "Leave me alone. Away with you."

The two banks seemed suddenly to blaze in brilliance. There was a patter that sounded suddenly as loud as a breaking wave. And from all around her a "whiss," concentrated and combined, ear-shattering in its intensity.

And then Martha kicked a foot sideways. There was a slight squeal, to be followed by a suddenly sickening cry of "God have merc—" that died into the nothingness of a concentrated, sucking, tearing sound, a splitter and a splatter, a ripping and a gurgling.

The moon still shone faintly down into the narrow depths of the lane. An owl hooted once again. A fox barked. But over all came the rasping noise that a dog makes when he grinds a bone.

TIBBITS'S farm, as has been explained, is a long way from anywhere, and rarely visited. But the sight and the sound of old Tibbits, grey hair and beard waving in the wind, at dawn the following morning was more than enough to rouse that genial labourer, Peter Landsome, and his wife from their bed. It caused them to hustle downstairs, shirt and nightshirt—Mrs. Peter wore the latter—flapping round their midriffs.

"Have you seen Martha?" shouted Tibbits.

"No!"

"Mercy! I came home from 'Kiddy' latish last night, put the horse up and then fell asleep in the kitchen, thinking Martha home.

"The hens woke me this very morning, and I went to find Martha and say my sorrys. The bed hadn't been slept in, though. Martha I couldn't find anywhere. Dear Lord!" The tears welled up in his eyes. "She wouldn't leave me, that I know, just because I'm late home; but where is she? Where is she?"

News travels slowly in that part of Shropshire. In point of fact it was two days before the country reporter heard of Mrs. Tibbits's disappearance.

Only the fact that the *Daily Flare* was at that moment busily engaged in hammering the police on a growing list of unsolved murders and undetected crimes, caused him to take the trouble to scribble three lines in a notebook and to take the further trouble of railing it, with four other sheets of utterly useless copy, in a square red envelope addressed to the news editor, *Daily Flare,* London.

It just happened, though, that this envelope arrived late enough in the evening to make a rather bored and very wearied news editor open it and then, cigarette whirling around his lips, the imp of overtiredness stirring him, rise to his feet, semi-bald head shining under a hundred-watt lamp, and stalk out of his Holy of Holies.

Outside his door he ran belly to belly into the rather rotund stomach of Leslie Bishop, one of the greatest of Fleet Street reporters, certainly one of the greatest crime men in the Street.

The imp of mischief must have exploded suddenly in his head at that moment, or perhaps it was that he had been called on to do a score of things that he had never wanted to do that day, and now felt like getting his own back. At any rate, he suddenly exclaimed: "Bishop, I think you had better go down to Shropshire to-night. There may be nothing in this, but it's odd that an old body should disappear with no trace, and, anyway, perhaps you can work up something. Besides, we haven't had a decent story from Shropshire for weeks."

IT WAS five minutes after Leslie Bishop had dismounted from the train, in the tree-lined valley that holds Cleobury Station, that the driver of a car summoned from the village three miles away said to him, as he was getting into the back: "Rare thrills we're having here now, sir." Said Leslie: "Oh yes? What are they?"

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"First an old dame disappears, sir. Then this morning when the police and other folk are searching for her, they find a skeleton in the wood, less than a mile indeed from her own home."

Said Leslie soberly: "Who was the old woman?"

"Martha Tibbits, her name, sir. Where will you want to be going? To the town, they told me on the phone."

Said Leslie, abruptly, and the driver started suddenly: "No. To the late Mrs. Tibbits's home, if the police are there now. If not, to the local police station."

Leslie's words, dutifully repeated and magnified twenty times over in the next hour, set a bee-hive humming.

"It's murder, I believe," said old Mother Smith to her neighbour. "God's grace, what was that gentleman who came down by the morning train but a London detective, I tell you. Didn't he know all about Mrs. Tibbits and where to go before even Bill Evry, with his car and his tongue, could tell him?"

Thomas Albins of the Crown, country charm doubling his bow of welcome, believed the same fable when Leslie an hour later came in, the local sergeant of police with him, and sat down at a table and ordered drinks.

He would have been more amazed if he could have heard all of Leslie's conversation with the sergeant. A précis of it was: "Listen, Sergeant. That skeleton you showed me in the police station was that of a woman, certainly, an old woman, and a woman who died, damn it, I would say within the last week, perhaps even later. You can tell that clearly, the marrow's still fresh in the bones. They are uncoloured, too, though how the hell a body can die and become a skeleton in a week, I don't know."

"It's impossible, sir."

"It's not, Sergeant. If you have been East you'll have seen a horse or any other animal picked clean by vultures within a couple of hours, but who on earth is going to do the picking here?" he queried perplexedly, not so much to the sergeant, but to the arched oak beams that crowned the white ceiling of the dining-room. He leant back and thought.

"Did you notice closely the few scraps of clothing and the basket you found by her? Torn and ripped strangely. Now what the hell could have caused that? If we were in Canada or Russia I would have said wolves, but it couldn't be."

"I'm taking the liberty of advising you, Sergeant, I know you won't mind; but you ought to get on to County Headquarters on this. There's something fishy here; something so devilish out of the ordinary that I doubt if it will ever be discovered."

Leslie never knew how near he was to the truth, but when at eight o'clock that night he phoned his story over to the *Flare,* he did definitely know, though, whose the skeleton was, for a once broken ankle, clearly visible in the pitiful framework of bones, had proved beyond all doubt that it was that of old Mother Tibbits.

The story he wrote, though, sent a score of reporters flying the next day to that out-of-the-way part of Shropshire. They got little more, nothing really that Leslie hadn't said previously.

Even the inquest a week later failed to elucidate matters, though the doctor concerned almost echoed Leslie's words in saying:

"The whole thing is unaccountable, unless you can presume that Mrs. Tibbits died suddenly for some reason or another —heart failure perhaps—and was. . . ." He checked and even stammered nervously, to continue, "It seems ridiculous to say it but—well, was devoured on the spot."

* * *

"I think, Brother Lion, you were unkind," said a voice.

"You mean, sir?"

"Why pick on that good old woman if your first line had to kill?"

"They had to, sir, on your orders. Just once, and certainly the kill has caused consternation."

"But that old woman," said the quiet voice.

"I know, sir, but my kith, the stoats and weasels, are apt to go gay when the blood lust is on them, and Brother Rat and the red gentleman, the fox, go more than gay when orders reach them to rip and tear and destroy."

"I know. She was a tender old woman, though, and we are not due for real bitterness yet."

Then the owner of the quiet voice coughed.

"Check your weasels and stoats awhile. The end of the year draws near and I am minded to have a little real humour before the old year dies."

* * *

The world in general little noted an insignificant little paragraph that was printed only in the columns of a quiet little Norfolk newspaper.

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The paragraph recorded the sudden death of one Samuel Bean, gave his age, fifty-seven, referred to him as the Prince of Wild Fowlers, and stressed the fame which had come to him twenty years previously when he had shot the first Casson's Snow Goose recorded for a century in Norfolk. Samuel Bean's death seemed so trivial a fact that even the local paper did not bother to send a man bicycling fifteen miles to find out the full particulars.

Which perhaps did not really matter so much, for the few particulars available would have been at variance with the truth. Only it would have brought to light many expressions of wonder voiced in such mellow haunts as the tap-room of the Golden Fleece, that fourteenth-century inn which fringes the quay-side a stone's throw from Sam's home, as to how "Sam were ever fool enough to be drowned on Well High Sands."

Pape, who trained horses near Six Mile Bottom, but had his real heart's love in wild-fowling, was over there at the time of Bean's death for the last fortnight of the season, and he too had no answer to make to what was a question utterly devoid of answer. All he could say when the words were addressed to him was:

"It's beyond me. I've know Sam for twenty years now, and he knew every bit of the coast from Blakeney round to Lynn; every creek, every mud-flat, every riven acre of saltings. As for his own home ground, why, damn it he knew High Sands and the whole sea's bed around Wells and as far out as possible far better than anyone else does or ever will. He could lead you anywhere blindfold and in the blackest night, and there was no fog that night, nothing to throw him out of his line home.

Said the doctor—an old friend to whom Pape spoke later—in answer to a wondering question:

"Oh, death was definitely due to drowning. No sign of heart failure. Bean was—well—as fit as a bean always. He had had a blow of some description in the face, though. An odd sort of blow. Must have been done, I think, after death, when he was being washed up. It was odd, though, to find a dead goose in his right hand. A goose that, apparently, had not been shot. Its neck was broken, Sam must have gripped on it for some reason, like a drowning man grips a stick. All the same. . . ."

"What?" said Pape.

"Well, as you know, I happened to find him. I was one of the party out looking for him. His body was lying twisted on the shore, but in his eyes was a look of terror, sheer agonizing terror, the like of which I never hope to see again. I closed them, of course, before anyone else came along. Keep this to yourself, Pape, too. It may, of course, have been the sheer terror of drowning, but—well, I don't know. . . . No, I'm damned well sure it was not that."

THE gale that blew its own particular jape across the barrenness of Altcar, hurried, blustering, on its way south-eastwards, and with its first thrusting forefingers twitched and tousled the tops of a five-mile belt of fir-trees that split a land of verdant marshes from the grey wastes of a wintry North Sea.

The trees bent, sighed, and creaked back a patter of protest. A badling of duck, flighting two hours earlier than usual out to sea, suddenly seemed to have become possessed of speed incredible and whirred overhead, to disappear seawards towards a raised sand-bank over which a fringe of foam was breaking.

Behind the fir-trees and partially sheltered by criss-cross lines of raised banks that split the fresh marshes up into patterns and squares, some six hundred or so grey geese raised their necks skywards and talking to each other in querulous shouts that the wind flung forward over the trees, out to the sands, out to the sea.

An old fisherman, making his way along the sea wall bank that leads to the little port of Wells, muttered to himself: "The geese are surely talking tonight."

The talking died suddenly. Perhaps in answer to a voice in the wind that commanded silence. Then the talking broke out again querulously, "Kehonka, ehonk—ahahonk."

An hour later Sam Bean wrinkled his nose at the wind, a smile crept quietly over his weather-beaten face and he veered half-right at the far end of the sea-bank, slid down the grey, mud sides of a creek, squelched through the ooze at the bottom, heard the water and the mud gurgle round his gum boots. Then he topped the other side and made his way through muddy pools, over cockle beds, across riven sand-banks to the most eastern corner of that vast acreage of sand-banks which is known as the High Sands.

To himself he thought: "The other fools will be lining the sea side of the firs now all around Abraham's Bosom. If I know

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the geese and this coast, they'll twirl down wind when the gale lifts them; flight across the bank by the dunes, and be sky high then, with the wind tossing them forward. But with this gale in their vents they'll be eager to drop to ground again and they'll drop by the bottom end of the sands."

It wanted an hour to dusk, a grim, grey, wind-riven, spume-swept dusk, as Sam Bean crept into a hollow scraped in the cold grey mud and grit of the Sands, scrunched down, back to the earth, nestled his gun in the crook of his arm, and lay prone, peering skywards, head pointing to the distant shore.

A long V of gulls slanted and slewed overhead as the gale tossed them, to drop three hundred yards beyond him with questing mews. The shrill callings of curlew sounded overhead. "Shall I?" muttered Sam Bean. "No, damn it, those whistlers can go free to-night. Better things I'm after."

A lone mallard suddenly twirled past, thirty feet high, flying as if possessed. Its speed was terrific; Sam Bean's aim quicker still. A harsh bark from "Maggie," as he called his three-inch, chamberless "twelve," a neck crumpling under on breast, a dull thud and a splutter of water, and then Sam Bean was out of his hide, was doubling nearly a hundred yards, had retrieved the bird and was back again in his hide once more.

A myriad sea-birds rose in shrill expostulation at the sudden noise, the whirling shapes of redshank twirled overhead, piping their high, petulant whistles, little clusters of stint rose like dust storms from the sand, swirled across the sky, and settled again. And above all, above the clamorous outcry of the gulls, echoed the startled "cur-leu as long-billed, brown shapes took wing in panic flight.

Then silence again. A light twinkled from the distant shore, the grey dusk deepened, the wind rose crescendo and, at its peak, bore faintly with it that utterly eerie echo of the wild, the sound of grey geese in flight.

And then, suddenly, it happened. A gaggle of some ten or so geese, V-shaped, came dropping out of the sky above him. Sam Bean raised himself, fired twice, saw two long-necked, grey, kehonking bodies, the leader and the bird on his right, crumble and crash, and then rapidly reloaded. The sky above him suddenly showed itself to be filled with a multitude of geese, dropping like packs of cards from the heavens, and one smaller gaggle of them —"Now, damn my eyes, won' I ever get this cartridge in?"—dropping at him, right at him.

Two brass cartridge-cases slid home, the gun clicked shut again, but as Sam raised it a thunderbolt struck him between the eyes. It was the leader of the second gaggle. Had Sam known it, he was the self-appointed leader of the forlorn hope—and in his case it was a forlorn one, for his proud out-stretched neck broke and twisted as it smashed into Sam's face.

Seven and a half pounds of weight, though, driven at a man at a speed of some fifty miles an hour of legitimate flight, and backed up by the force of a full gale, is apt to do some damage.

Sam Bean crumpled, too, dropped his gun and staggered back, hands to his face. Then another downy body drove full-tilt at him and Sam toppled over on the ground, winded and half-stunned.

Six hundred grey, grim, wild voices ripped the air with a sudden staggering "ehonker." Six hundred grey bodies dropped like down to earth, the wind howled a shade louder, more triumphantly than before, the spray from the pools and the thin layer of water from the sands rose in driven wraiths, and the dusk became a shade darker.

Sam Bean staggered to his feet, to be met with another plummet-like charge and to find a score or two score birds driving at him with their broad bills, treading over him, delving at his eyes, blinding him with their wings. His right hand shot out, caught the neck of a dead bird—it was that of the leader of the forlorn hope—and tried to raise and use it as a flail. There was an avalanche of weight on his arm now, a weight that struggled and flapped and beat with wings. His mouth was filled with down, his eyes were closing. Now his body was no longer visible; it was a writhing mound over-topped by struggling birds that tore it and probed it and fouled it.

Then the mound ceased to struggle. The dusk changed to darkness. The geese stopped talking. And a merciful sea flowed up and hid things.

CHAPTER TWO

IT occurred during the presentation of a Private Member's bill. A. G. Target (Cottleston, National Government) was the cause of it. It was his bill.

At any rate it would never have attract-

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ed any attention if it had not been for the fact that animals and the world of nature had suddenly become news this warm early June day. And even then it might have lapsed into the limbo of the unreported if it had not been for the fact that the House was due to discuss later that afternoon an Unemployment Relief scheme which would appeal to no one, but which at least called for a large attendance. It was grossly inadequate from one point of view, sanguinarily unnecessary from the other side, and with Ascot at hand it was not worth arguing about anything really.

Bill Edwards of the *Daily Flare*, one of the best men in the Gallery, had got in early because of it. Unemployment was his pet subject, and the policy of the *Flare* then was to make unemployment its main scourge with which to flagellate Government and Opposition alike. Bill came out of that small, rather stuffy Gallery bar a few moments after Target had begun speaking, said in his inimitable soft Kelso tongue: "Stay awhile, Jock, I'll just put my head in and see who is gabbling," and then whispered back a second later: "I'll be awhile, I'm afraid," and the door closed behind him.

Now it does not matter exactly what Bill wrote or what appeared in the *Daily Flare*. To be true, it was so emotional that it made old women up and down the country forswear eating meat for ever. What really matters, though, is what Target said, and how he said it.

He rose, a thick-set, fair-haired figure of a man, obviously a soldier once and obviously a soldier who should by rights own to a long row of ribbons on his chest. Target had, as a matter of fact, a D.S.O. and an M.C., but that is beside the point; only it shows that he was no crank. Then, in the level, quiet tones of custom he began to frame his formal opening.

The raftered roofs of the House were grey in the shadow, the light filtered through sparse window space, and suddenly a sparrow, trapped in the worst prison in the world, fluttered wings against a vaulted window and Target looked up at it.

Then he dropped his studied poise, his urbanity; dropped his papers, held for one moment behind his back, so that they fell scuttering on the floor.

"Mr. Speaker," he said—you can read this in Hansard, read how Target's even voice rose to fever heat—his carefully planned words to an inspired peroration, "I came here to place before the House a bill that I find I can no longer place in the words that I had intended and in the manner I had thought fit. It is a bill, the bare bones of which are that animals should no longer be allowed to be tortured before they are killed for human consumption. The Bare Bones—" He checked himself suddenly.

AND then the spirit of a divine charity —or could it have been a Pan-like inspiration?—fell on Target, that level-headed man who, at the Bluff in 1915 had got his D.S.O. for sticking eight Prussian guards in a row, so that he became eloquent for perhaps the first time in his life.

"I ate a juicy steak to-day," he said bluntly, "so did the Honourable Members of Sotton, Westwick, and Backover. We ate them together at my club. I trust that my three guests enjoyed their lunch. I don't doubt that the majority of members in this House at the moment also enjoyed that midday meal, with its essentially English luncheon dishes, the basis of which is some form of meat. Mr. Speaker, sir, a few days ago I met one of my constituents, a slaughter hand by trade, a six-foot-high beefy individual, employed by the Municipal Corporation Slaughter House in my constituency of Cottleston.

"And I went with him, at his request, to see the red-flagged place in which he worked, and how he worked.

"His interest was to try and convince me about a matter irrelevant to my present subject." Target suddenly waved an arm upwards at an already rather bewildered House. "I can't go on being parliamentary," he said. (Cries of "Order!") "I apologize, Mr. Speaker," said Target. "Order, though, why should there be any? Those Honourable Members who went overseas a few years ago will know what I mean when I ask: Have you ever stood in a support line when the barrage has hit it? Have you ever had to lead poor, dumb human sheep into a charnal-house where, as they arrived, half of them dropped and the blood streamed out, and their bellies with it at times, and the mud in the trench turned like yellow vomit, clotted with patches of liver-hued, scarlet froth, and you had to be the man to urge another human man onwards?

"That, I submit, is nothing to your slaughter-houses. Men are men. They can talk and argue and vote. An animal cannot vote. I tell you, though, in all sincerity, that I stood a few days ago by a miniature brick-lined trench within a

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stone's throw of a picture palace in Cottleston, and a line of sheep, fifty or so strong, stood tethered beside this trench.

"The water flowed down it, flowed past the nose of the first sheep, but he did not drop on his knees and lap it up. Instead he was hunched back on the rope that held him, like a child might start and hold away when it was going to be ill-treated.

"And just in front of his head, out of sight, I admit, but in full scent, my friend the butcher was standing, blood on his arms, knife in hand, a hanging sheep in his arms, blood pouring from its throat, its last agonies of life twitching and stirring it in impotent protest.

"As it died, the knife moved with perfect symmetry, its skin was off, its entrails ripped out and tossed on one side. Blood, yellow slime, and things unmentionable in this austere and very venerable building, poured out into a runway that led to the trench over which my sheep—as I was calling him—was leaning.

"You could see that sheep stagger in stark, sheer, utter terror then. He staggered for the fraction of a second, that is all perhaps; by that time his predecessor had been finally amputated and dealt with. But, Mr. Speaker, if ever a man saw horror, I saw it in the eyes of that next sheep, my sheep.

"Thank God it didn't last long. A hand reached out for his neck, gripped it; he swung round a corner; for one moment he gazed at me with poor, plaintive, round eyes that seemed to say: 'What have I done to you, oh man?' and the next moment I saw my friend the slaughter-man chucking his heart into a bucket, tipping out remnants into the same runway. And the same smell of warm blood and ghastliness rose up just as the same buzzing crowd of flies rose up as each victim died.

"You could hear two-score sheep crying, if the word is right, as they drew nearer to that bloody corner, and within a few minutes the stench of blood was so strong that the next sheep sensing it cringed away like—like anyone except a Christ might cringe from a crown of thorns. And when it was all over later that day, my friend the slaughter-man said to me: 'Now don't you think, guv'ner, a job such as mine is damn poorly paid at fifty bob a week?"

* * *

"Isn't it about time that we did something drastic?" grunted a leonine voice in the land of unreality.

"My poor brother, and have you learnt so little? Don't you know that human saying, "The little more and how much it is'?" And then quietly: "But in the fullness of time, by the ripples of the stream, and the warmth of the earth, and the grey fruits of the lower sea, we will give them the little more, and then turn the little into too much."

* * *

His name was Locustella Noevia. He lived in Mr. James Newspett's garden, at the far end of it, where the nettles and docks grew rank over a heap of old pails and pots, and he was a jubilant sort of individual.

Very jubilant when he moved, for when he moved he became really happy and he hopped gigantically in consequence and when he had finished hopping he chattered.

It was that chatter which caused James Newspett, who looked like his name, fat and overfed and utterly untrustworthy, to say one early June morning: "Oh, curse those flaming grasshoppers, chattering away. They'll drive me insane with their damned tickery-tockery!"

James Newspett's words may have carried to the bottom of the garden and become distorted in doing so. Or if they did not, then it must have been some other message which reached the inch-long, yellow-green body of Locustella Noevia, and rammed itself into his prehensile head, but whatever it was, the grasshopper hopped suddenly in the air and did not chatter in his hopping. Then he scuttled off to the pots and pans of his home, tipped up green grasses with his hands and whispered: "Orders, orders, fall in."

At the same time, a rather rotund, green-coated, pompous individual, Mr. Frocga by name, came scuttling out of his pet swimming bath and was preparing to sun-bathe amidst a bank of fresh water cresses when he too heard a whispered word, deflated himself from the sheer terror of the news wirelessed to him and then suddenly, the call of duty and a sense of pride enveloping him, puffed himself out again, went "Squeak" through an over-wide pair of lips and summoned a host of relatives up to his side.

They came from lush grass and meadow grass, from the brook that passed by old Newspett's garden, from the wider reaches of the river lined with kingcups into which the brook flowed a distance away. They came from unknown swamp grounds, from little roadside ditches, the lips of wells, the underneath of watertubs.

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And they came like a camel corps marching by, proud, gay and gallant, in a semi-hopping, sibilant canter. And the song they sang was a strange one and a translation of it might have resembled a variation of the words of the cavalry canter.

* * *

"Always excitable," said a soft, sluggish voice.

"My dear chap, utterly so; though remember in these days we refrain from criticizing. People might say that you and I were cold, clammy and emotionless—well"—the soft, succulent voice chuckled to itself—"the clammier the better, I understand."

"You too the sacrifice?" said the voice, as a grotesque figure, leaving a smeary trail behind him on the gravel of Newspett's path, thrust his head through the narrow privet hedge and peered on to the lawn.

"Me too. Wives, sons and daughters and all the little grandchildren as well. Hell to my soul now! Away with you."

A fat cock thrush, thoughts of nestlings on his mind, swooped down at a ruddy streak on the lawn and stopped suddenly in indecision.

"Hasn't the word reached you to-day, you fool?" said a length of slime.

"Chitter, but I'm sorry. It came through just a moment ago and I'd forgotten already."

"Then don't forget."

The bird took flight, chattered its song twice over and said: "Lest you forget, brother, for a day. I am sorry, I am sorry."

"A near escape, friend," said the father of the local slugs.

"So near, but what does escape mean or matter, particularly to-day? We live by fear and in fear, dying is sometimes a relief."

"It should be in our case."

"It must be," said the worm.

* * *

The bank was high, thick with early summer flowers and the grass turning to hay, silhouetted in the blood-red light of the setting sun.

Hawthorn, who kept this section of it, had just passed by on his way to the level-crossing gate that led to his cottage. Had he dallied five minutes longer over his pipe on the five-mile bridge, he would have seen . . . ! But he did not dally and so he did not see. . . .

Kipling has written the song of the train, but the 11.15 from Euston, that chortled and jinked north that night, sang to James Newspett's mind a song all of its own.

It began when with his wife Jenny by his side they stood peering out of the window of a double sleeper, and the couplings creaked and the whistle went and a desolate platform seemed to move, as a thousand nuts and bolts and pipes found tongue.

Then the clatter of a tunnel drowned the song, and James Newspett lapsed into oblivion.

He missed the sudden acceleration of the train as it left the bottle-necked cluster of lines behind and Sid Smith, the driver, pushed the throttle lever farther down. He missed the accelerated clatter, the rasp and rhythm of motion, missed the tunes of the clattering wheels that now sang with each revolution.

Ho boys, ho boys, ho boys, ho boys!
Let her go, let her go, let her go, oh boys!
Take a chance, take a chance, take a chance, good boys!
Go to sleep, go to sleep, go to sleep, lucky boys!

But Sid Smith missed nothing of it. The red light from the open furnace—Gregg was shovelling in coal—lit up his long, straight nose, grizzled chin, and lined face. One hand on the regulator, he peered out through the right-hand cab window, saw green signals ahead and pressed the throttle down farther.

The tail of the engine seemed to snake, the pressure rose steadily, a bitter wind whipped one side of him, sulphurous heat toasted the other, and a suburban station rattled by in the midst of bedlam.

"Up to time at the start all right."

"You brought her out well, Sid."

"So I should—Elstree's green, so we can go now," he interpolated suddenly. "Keep the fire trimmed, mate."

The Lady of Loch Ness, driven by Sid Smith, stoker William Gregg, with sixty first-class sleeping passengers in the train behind her, and a hundred or so third-class individuals slopped together—and most of them half-slopped—rattled through Winstone, thirty miles from London, red glow lighting the sky, chattering voice causing old William Titmouse, the carter, who had had nine over the eight and going home in circles to bed, to say:

"Plurry trainsh—go fashter than my cart maybe, not 'alf as shafe though."

And at that moment Sid Smith, peering intently out of his cab, suddenly shouted so that his voice drowned the hiss of the

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steam-compressor and the rattle of the cab: "Hell! what's on the line?" Brakes jammed on, the train lurched, from the bogies came a sickening, ghastly, squelch like a hot flat-iron rolling over sticky butter.

The bogies lifted, the squelch continued, the driving wheels felt it for an instant and lifted, too. "Jump, Gregg, jump!" shouted Sid Smith, but neither could jump in time.

The Lady of Loch Ness leapt like a shooting star on her near side, twisted in the air almost, and crashed, a hell of flaming smoke and flying coal, down the twenty-foot embankment. She took her tender with her and all but two of her coaches, and as each coach left the rails, it lifted with a greasy slithering sound that overrode the screechings of brakes and the screaming of tortured steel.

Afterwards the Lady of Loch Ness lay bruised and battered and buried four feet deep in the tossed-up earth. And if inanimate things can listen, she heard not only the screamings of tortured individuals, but the whispered agonies of animate things that cannot speak.

One of those who could speak was Mr. James Newspett. He took five minutes dying; both his legs were shorn off and in his last fleeting moments it seemed to him that Jenny was alternately walking over his face and then kissing him. It was not Jenny, though—she had been dead from the first impact—but simply Locustella Noevia, a humble little individual who was also about to die; half his body was shorn away, and perhaps Mr. James Newspett, tasting his blood, may have thought of Jenny's lips.

CALVERLY DEXTER, editor of the *Daily Flare*, coughed twice and said:

"Damn it, Leslie, you're not drunk, are you?" when he heard Leslie Bishop's voice —Leslie, as it has been said, was his chief reporter—over the phone, somewhere after twelve o'clock, when the main edition was going to press with a relatively complete story of the disaster in it.

"Drunk be damned," said Leslie. "I know that there are forty people dead. That's not the story. There's something devilish behind it. Twenty million sanguinary worms, twenty million slugs, millions of grasshoppers and frogs, and God alone knows what else, caused this show.

"The place is thick, or moist rather, with their dead mess; they're piled high; they must have gathered here from miles around. Listen now, sir. We've had a host of animal disasters already this year. Here is something tangible. Something made these myriad brutes collect here. Now give me a telephonist and I'll push over the intro. You can follow it with the dead and the other gory descriptions afterwards."

IT WAS in June 1931 that they gave Bill Conway the job as publicity agent of Brightquay. He proved a marvelous one. By August he had persuaded an American millionairess, with her princeling Caucasian husband, to be seen dancing at the ballroom of the Majestic regularly each night. And when that palled, which it did after two weeks, simply because the pair danced like ordinary people and looked like them, as well, he got Cosmos, who was trying to prove to the world that you could fly with a pair of wings on your back and by pedaling your legs hard, to give his first exhibition flight from a miniature Eiffel Tower in the centre of the town.

The tail-end of a weathercock saved Cosmos from untimely disaster. It caught in the seat of his plush trousers so that he only fell lightly on to a roof top.

Cosmos, whose real name was Antonio Perelli, hung, though, for at least five seconds from the arrow of the cock, and afforded a marvellous picture which the newsreels snapped up and the daily papers revelled in.

Bill Conway always affirmed that he had staged the whole stunt, even to the extent of the durability of Cosmos's pants.

Certainly the Brightquay Corporation took him at his words, and for four years he was a local god.

He resurrected the Pavilion and restored it as it was meant to be, the product of a bewildered prince's fancy, and as a result people flocked there from Streatham or Wanganui and said: "Marvellous" or "Gawd" as the case might be.

He arranged for an international, round-the-houses motor race that deafened most of the old women in the town, killed two drivers and was the nearest thing to a flop he had ever staged. It happened to be won by three foreign cars, racing on an unheard-of brand of Asiatic petrol, and all the motoring, petrol, and oil companies threatened to withdraw their advertising in consequence.

Bill Conway got over it, of course. A month later he had a *concours d'élégance*, in which every prize was won by the product of dear old England, and where the winning car, a popular "Mr. Everyman's" machine (done up for the occasion to a

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Rolls-Royce price figure), was driven by the alleged loveliest girl in England. It was Bill Conway, too, who had given the *Daily Flare*, the previous morning, the scoop that the girl concerned had just declined to elope with the Crown Prince of Youraliana.

As a very natural result, of course, Brightquay, whose hideously hot concrete promenades were always packed with suffering mortals who believed they were enjoying themselves, became surfeited with a swelter of humanity.

The promenade under the cliffs, where the slot machines are installed and where everyone, except Bill Conway, of course, agreed that more toughs and jail-birds collected than anywhere else in the world, was simply hopping with humanity.

And, of course, you could not see the sea. It was plague-ridden with bare-backed beings who went down to it in an effort to get brown, burnt, and busy.

Quotia, who happened to be a starfish on the farthest end of that festering shore, and had only survived because he clung to the near sides of a rock that had so many jagged points to it that even he could hardly move without hurting himself, stuttered out one day the exasperated words: "Lord, these humans! stinking and rotten! Oh, Master of the World, if you could but help!"

Jefferson, a portly plaice, rubbing his dappled belly on the sandy soil twenty feet below the surface half a mile out to sea, heard them and echoed them.

They went outward by devious routes, reached the rich Isles of Illusion, were transcribed and set fluttering back.

BILL CONWAY took a holiday in early July from Brightquay. He told Harrivale Westley, who ruled the town and had at least two European princes always trotting at his heels, that he was tired, bored and also in need of stimulant.

Harrivale, who knew human nature and thought he knew what being in love meant, said: "Well, Bill, go away then. Although, why my dear chap, you can't fetch your girl down here. . . ."

Said Bill: "Principally because Brightquay isn't the place to take anyone to these days. You and I, with our damn talk of Doctor Brightquay, our ruddy schemes and sensations, we've killed everything decent about it and, by God, some day we'll have to suffer for it ourselves."

He was rather overstrung and also very much in love, was Bill Conway.

Said Harrivale, bald, blown, and bloated: "Dear boy, you do need a holiday. Take a month, dear boy, and be good, just as you dream of being."

"I'm sorry," said Conway, relentingly, "but I do need a change. I'll be back in a fortnight, though; mustn't miss out next star turn. It's going to be a winner."

An olive-green sea lapped ever so placidly against the chalk white walls of a tiny cove.

Two herring gulls, blue-white in colour almost in the rising light of dawn, twisted over a flicker of wave at the mouth of the cove. From the fields of the headland a lark rose triumphant, and two slim figures suddenly clattered down a shingle beach, threw off dressing-gowns, and plunged into the clear blue water.

A splutter and then a voice:

"My own dear," said Conway, "God, but it's good to be with you here." He swam effortlessly towards her and both stood side by side, ripples of waves washing their chests, the mounting sun topping the cliff and holding them in its focus.

"You're not cold?" he queried; and Fiona, the girl by his side, suddenly turned her head and smiled at him.

"Not cold, darling, but perhaps a little afraid, afraid for our own happiness, afraid we can never recapture these first fine moments again, afraid that I'm being a fool and that your mother may be furious when she hears that you have run off and married a 'tea-shop girl.'"

A little wave broke over her lips as she said the words, and she spluttered and laughed suddenly. "Darling, forget it. Isn't it heavenly here? Let's swim out to the point." They swam.

So did something else.

You could not see it from anywhere save the top of the cliffs and there was no one there to see.

Just a minute, triangular black pillar of sail, that left a ripple of water behind it. There was no one even if they had seen it to believe, moreover, that such a thing could happen—to understand.

For no one could have heard the wirelessed words that had caused a very commonplace fish to desert his quarters off Sierra Leone and make his way into waters which chilled him daily, checked his breathing, and from which he knew there was no return.

And then suddenly Fiona's slim body checked in swimming and her voice shouted: "Darling, what's that?"

Bill Conway, who knew no other sea than

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England, said: "Oh, something drifting in on the tide. Angel, let's turn back now, though; we've swum out enough."

And then the something ceased to drift.

A knife cut the water and the foam boiled. A girl's voice shrilled in agony: "Darling, help!" A minute patch of water grew scarlet suddenly, oddly scarlet, for the red light of dawn was over, and then a man's voice screamed in demented horror.

IT MADE an incredible story as retold by Jenks, a fisherman, who stumbled on the scene.

"A loon man, half-drowned he be, too, lying by the side of as purty a girl as ever you did see; only her legs were cleft from her. Yes, a loon man they now have in the madhouse over St. Ives way. And by them, not twenty yards away, stranded on the beach, one girt big shark, the like of which no Cornishman ever did see here before. A mortal sad sight indeed."

CALVERLEY DEXTER, who edited the *Flare*, had seen the last page of the last edition to bed and was standing, bleary-eyed, a short, rather tub-like little figure, when Tom Slowly, the chief sub-editor, came up to him.

"It reads well, doesn't it?" said Calverley —then quickly—"What's up?"

"I'm replating with your permission, sir."

"Why?"

"Casteven, our local man at Porthay in Cornwall—he's always late, damn him—has just weighed in with a story. Four people drowned by two octopuses or octopi, whatever you call them, in the bay there. It gives an added kick to the lead." And suddenly, irrationally rational, for a newspaperman: "There can't be anything in it really, can there?"

There was, though, as George Smith found—a nice chap George, true-blooded Cockney, fifty-four years old. For having read about Margaret he took Ma and the nippers with him down to Brightquay to see the remains the following day.

There had been a high wind in the night driving up-Channel, but when George and his wife with Ted and Mabel trundling, rather grimy of face, behind them, reached the beach the sun was shining, the sea dark blue and oily, and Mabel, surveying first the sea and then the crowded beaches, vouchsafed:

"Pa, pa, ain't it blue, ain't it luvly; and look at that there grand pier all shining and bright with a boat by it. Ooh, and Ma,"

this with tears in her voice, "look at the beach—ooh, look at the beach, it's worse than Clapham Common on bank 'oliday. 'Ow can I make a castle there when there ain't no room to turn?"

Said George Smith: "Don't yer mind that, dearie, we'll find room. Ho, luck-a-day, Ma, it's good ter smell the sea agine, ain't it? Wot's that old song I used ter sing when I was a nipper? I've got it. 'Martha swallered a jelly-fish, Janie got the cramp, Pa and Ma began to scream, because the sea was damp. As I was paddling out to sea, a crab got hold of me, Oh, weren't we a jolly family at Brightquay by the sea!'

"Now then, nippers"—this to Ted and Mabel after the quartette had found two square yards of unemployed sand—"you've got your bathers on. Slip off yer clothes and inter the briny. Ma and me'll watch yer and ave our dip later."

Mabel struck water first, Ted at her heels, and shouted: "Coo, dad, it's cold. Come on, Teddy, yer coward, it won't 'urt," and then breasted in up to her little chest, and, salt spray in her eyes, straight into a fat man.

"Mind where you're going, missie," shouted the fat man, to break into sudden blasphemy—"Ow, a damn crab's got me. Help, ow, help!"

He jinked back to the shore, kicked a ruddy, spotted leg out of the water, ripped a small orange and black crab off a big toe, and then humped himself, straddle-legged, on the sand, fat paunch overhanging his knees, and started mauling the slight wound and trying to suck it.

"The bleeder, the perishin' bleeder," he muttered.

"Crab caught yer, guv'ner?" said George Smith. "Now, damn it, one's got my Ted. The devil!" as Ted's voice suddenly rose to unknown heights in a shrill scream.

He tore splashing out of the water, holding a trembling hand in front of him, howling:

"It weren't no crab, dad; a funny, floating thing like—like coloured tripe, all jelly-like. I touched it and it stung."

"Jelly-fish," said George Smith. "Don't mind, kiddy. Hi you, Mabel! Come out of the sea, it's dangerous."

And then from out by the pier came a sudden scream, heartrending: from near by, not a hundred yards from where George Smith stood, Ted in his arms, a woman's voice rang out in agony, and opposite to George Smith, twenty yards or so out, a tall, weak-chinned youth stiff-

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ened, threw up his thin hands, and sank.

It was then, and for the first time, that the whole wide multitude that covered the whole wide front and filled the whole wide sea realized that the sea itself was not entirely polluted by their own bodies, but bore it own strange cargo.

Not those pitiful, beautiful, mauve-white fantasies we call jelly-fish, but floating, glutinous blotches of red, mottled black and orange, that drifted in with an apparently stagnant tide, and as they drifted they touched, and as they touched, a voice rose in pain or terror, both if their size was large enough.

Mabel and Ted were snivelling in the shelter of George Smith's arm while this was happening. Mrs. George Smith had fainted, and on the whole wide front the sea was busy giving up the living multitudes of its unwashed bathers, and the bodies of quite a few who would no longer need any washing.

THE lecture was one of the dullest imaginable from the layman's point of view. From the specialist's it must have been enthralling, for Sir Purvis Crichton-Half-Browne was dilating to the bureaucracy of research on his pet theory, "The Immunization of Disease by the Application of Rival and Counter-Acting Diseases."

This fact only, though, ever saw the light of day because a bored, over-worked night news-editor sent an insufferable idiot of an infantile reporter out to it from sheer ennui. He had said to his infant assistant: "Roberts, Purvis X.Y.Z. Browne is talking on something which means, I believe, that if you have got measles and they give you consumption, you get well. Anyway, your face is all spotty, and if they don't give you a bottle of Guinness to remedy it, then have one at my expense."

The boy Roberts went and returned with two columns of hopeless jargon, which he explained by saying that even he did not understand what it meant, but he had taken down in shorthand what seemed to be the serious bits.

Many days afterwards, though, he confided in a friend.

"It's odd, you know, almost the last words of old Sir Purvis's address were 'To my mind, gentlemen, we have little to fear from the world of disease in so far as the unexpected is concerned. The days of newfound complaints or, shall we say, surprise packets, are behind us. We have segregated sickness in its relative localities, almost, I fancy, card-indexed the list of human complaints.'

"He rambled on," said Jones. "I think he said something like—wait a moment, I'll dig out my notes and read it—yes, here we are—'You see we have the knowledge today, gentlemen, of cause and effect. What we have yet to attain is the perfect knowledge of remedy. But to take a quite imbecile example, we do know that leprosy isn't and never can be an indigenous complaint, say, in a country like England, just the same as we know that a patient found in Nova Zembla, with all the symptoms of heat-stroke, cannot be suffering from that cause.'"

IT WENT phizz, and it stung little Margery Lees very quickly below her knee as she opened the drive gate to a grey Rolls that glided in like a Poplar Hawk Moth.

The Rolls checked a moment; Sir Purvis Crichton-Half-Browne, whose heart was the kindliest in the world, poked a grey head out of the window, slipped sixpence into an eager hand, and said: "Well, Margery, been a good girl? Tell your daddy I want to talk to him tomorrow about—ah, there he is."

A bluff, stocky, cropped-headed man came out from the lodge gates, touched a grizzled forehead, and said:

"Good evening; we've been missing you, sir."

"Thanks, Tom; I've been missing Lincolnshire, too, and home. I want to have a talk with you to-morrow about that bit of marsh you've been digging and deepening. I've been thinking that, if we can only flood it properly, it has the makings of a perfect decoy. There are enough trees round it, it's quiet enough, and with a few hand-reared ducks to encourage the others, we ought to get some grand flights. Anyway, good night to you, Tom, and to you, Margery. I'll be seeing you to-morrow."

The Rolls slithered up the long, chestnut-lined drive. Old Tom turned, clicked the gate, and said: "Marge, my pet, be you to bed." Then: "Drat these midges."

"I've been bitten, too, Dad," said Margery.

Tom laughed, lifted the child in his arms, and grumbled: "And I'll bite you, too, I will. I'm the big bear, I am." They bundled into the cottage, laughing and shouting.

"BY Jove, there's more water in here than I thought they would be," said Purvis, Tom by his side, while the pair prodded from the bank the depths of a

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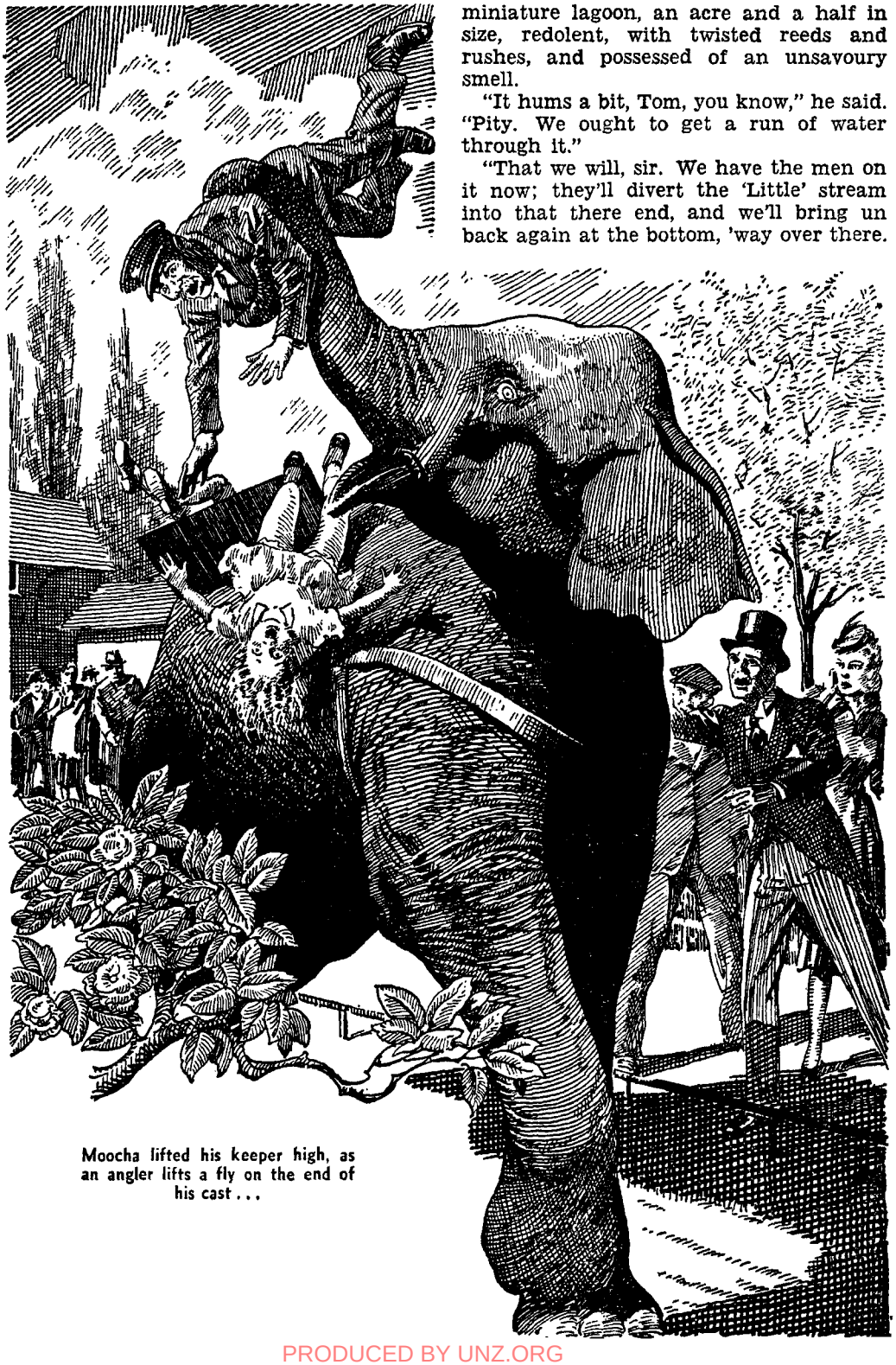
miniature lagoon, an acre and a half in size, redolent, with twisted reeds and rushes, and possessed of an unsavoury smell.

"It hums a bit, Tom, you know," he said. "Pity. We ought to get a run of water through it."

"That we will, sir. We have the men on it now; they'll divert the 'Little' stream into that there end, and we'll bring un back again at the bottom, 'way over there.



Moocha lifted his keeper high, as an angler lifts a fly on the end of his cast . . .

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That'll freshen un up, Sir Purvis, and when the run of it clears the muck out you might indeed be able to stock un with rainbows. We—we—we—we . . ." his teeth chattered suddenly.

Sir Purvis Crichton-Half-Browne turned quickly. "Hullo, Tom, what's the matter? Got the shivers? Why, man, you're not looking too fit. Here, give me your hand."

His fingers touched a red-hot wrist.

"Here, you go to bed straightaway, Tom. You've got flu, man, you're all feverish. Come on with your arm, now. I've seen enough of the decoy. You go back to your home and then—hell, damn it! Lord, these midges do bite. Yes, we want to get fresh water in here badly."

As they came to Tom's cottage, the door was flung open before either man could lift a hand.

The care-lined face of an aging country woman peered out.

"Oh, Sir Purvis, thank God you be come with my husband. Marge is bad—deliriarius, I think—and all burning hot all over. I was just waiting for Tom to come back to send him for the doctor."

"Don't you worry about the doctor yet, Mrs. Tom," said Purvis. "Don't forget I'm not only your landlord, but a doctor as well. I expect it's flu. Your good husband has got it, too, I'm afraid. You had better see him to bed while I go and see little Margery." And, hand resting on a door knob: "She's in here, isn't she?"

She was; in a little black truckle bed, in a yellow-washed room with a lithograph of four angels over her head, and her flaring red face and wide-open eyes staring over a pair of not over-clean sheets.

Also she was babbling incoherently, singing in a shrill voice: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I give my soul to Christ to keep. Wake I more or wake I never— Oh, Mother, shall I be as hot as this for ever?"

Sir Purvis Crichton-Half-Browne took one look at her and the years slipped away from him. He became once again the general practitioner that he had been thirty-five long weary years before.

Very late that evening a rather rotund, normally very jolly, but always very diligent, country doctor sat opposite Purvis and heard the great man say almost pleadingly: "Well, what do you make of them, Murdoch?"

"Damn bad. Presumably it's flu. Reminds me in a way of the breed of flu that walloped the world early in nineteen, and yet . . ."

"I'm pleased you say 'and yet'. Presumably you're not quite sure what it is."

Said Murdoch, who was as level-headed as you make them: "Has your man ever been out East?"—and then thoughtfully, face frowning—"but even if he has, it couldn't, wouldn't account for the little girl."

Purvis Crichton-Half-Browne poured another whisky out for the pair of them and almost chuckled, despite the creased furrows on his brow.

"So you think the same. And, of course, it's quite impossible. But if it were not impossible, then even another whisky wouldn't hurt us, might indeed be very good for us. Quite impossible, obviously so, quite, quite . . . No, by God! Oh, but it couldn't be!"

"What do you mean?" said Murdoch.

"Nothing as yet. Either I'll tell you when I see you to-morrow—you'll be coming down early, I expect—or else—well, I'll never give you the chance of saying 'What do you think that old fool Sir Purvis thought a simple case of flu might be?' Well, well, I'll be seeing you to-morrow anyway."

He was; but Sir Purvis Crichton-Half-Browne saw Doctor Murdoch in a professional capacity, with himself as patient, for Sir Purvis's head was flaming and throbbing and bursting. And he was alternately white hot and then icy cold, and he found it at times intensely awkward to try to talk rationally, as one medical man should to another, because of a bell which kept ringing and ringing in his head.

He did contrive to force a smile over his dry lips, though, as Murdoch entered his bedroom, and he contrived, too, to stammer out: "Well, Murdoch, have I got flu as well?"

"You're chock-a-block with fever, anyway, flu or not," said Murdoch, "and if it's any interest to you, I've put Tom and his little girl on quinine."

"Oh," said Purvis, "so you think as I do?"

Murdoch said, "If you haven't got malaria, then I'll go and be a vet instead of a doctor. And your keeper and his girl have got it, too."

"But how the dickens can we have got it, Murdoch?"

"Margery told me she was bitten. . . ."

"Yes, and so her father was and so was I. But, man, it's against all medical doctrine—here in England. It's—it's impossible—it's frankly immoral."

"We'll talk about that when you're better," said Murdoch. "At the moment you're

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just my patient and I'm the fool country doctor, but I'm going to treat you and test you for malaria, and you're going to do what I say—that is, unless you'd like me to send for Algernon Phipps, or one of the other experts."

"Don't be a silly fool, Murdoch. I know you're right, but it's all wrong, my dear chap, all utterly at variance with everything we've ever learnt or ever taught."

OF COURSE it was all wrong, but somehow or other the *Daily Flare* got hold of it, and while Sir Purvis lay with a temperature of one hundred and four and Margery's threatened to break the mercury in the thermometer, old Tom gave a shudder one night and went up and up and up himself, like his temperature had been going.

It was all wrong, of course; and every doctor of note in the wide world—save a Hindu called Brahamuista Patu, who believed in things beyond the mortal ken—said it was utterly impossible, and talked of incipient malaria "possibly," or of a new form of food poisoning.

That was until it started spreading, and spread it did, very rapidly. Mrs. Tom went down with it and all the staff at Wootten Creek, Sir Purvis's home, and in a fortnight there were two hundred cases of malaria in the district. Murdoch had had to take on two assistants, the local chemist had run out of quinine, and there was not a hot-water bottle to be had for miles.

Then, of course, the figure-heads of Harley Street awoke, and they crowded out all the hotels in the district already overcrowded by garrulous reporters, who were thanking God that they had got out of town on a story at last.

They drained old Purvis's newly formed decoy, and the specimens they found there in one day set the world by its ears.

"Anopheles? Very definitely," the report said; while scientists sat back and scratched their heads, wondering how in Heaven's name the diminutive, intriguing, damnable little mosquito that bears malaria with it could have found its way to and survived and bred in England.

They had every spot of stagnant water for miles round sprayed diligently. They inoculated every human being they could get their hands on. They segregated every inhabitant of Wootten Creek, Sir Purvis's village.

And despite their efforts it spread.

There were altogether one thousand, eight hundred and sixty-four cases of malaria, which does not include that of old Farthingale, who, coming home drunk in his cart from market, fell into Bablingly Creek, got half-drowned, full of pneumonia, and in dying said: "Put me down, Nursey dear, as one of the Madeira victims."

And when it was all over, for the epidemic was short and sweet, Sir Purvis Crichton-Half-Browne did the bravest thing of his life. He risked the wrath of the British Medical Council and issued a full and authoritative statement to the *Daily Flare,* in which he said bluntly: "I have been a fool, I was a fool when I said in a lecture that we had virtually categorized and localized all the ailments of mankind. I should have known that, to quote a hackneyed old saying, 'There are more things in Heaven and earth. . . .'"

Undoubtedly, though, the *Daily Flare* did the wisest thing of anyone. For about the sixth time that year they totalled up every incident connected with the animal world, they gave every available inch of space to reported accounts of each incident, and then they said very quietly, which was a change for them and which made it all the more sincere, in the leader columns, words to the effect:

"This cannot be coincidence. It cannot be just fate. Is it possible that the world we have believed to be a servile world—the world of dumb creatures and dumber things—has risen against us?"

* * *

A downy body slithered noiselessly on outstretched wings over the shoulder of a little figure.

"Tell me, Oh Master," his words croaked, "how did you do it?"

"My good eagle, friend of my heart, if weak mankind can send living fruit ten thousand miles so that it still retains its sweetness, or spoken words can lisp from one side of the world to the other, surely we can have our little wonders as well? Grows amusing, though, doesn't it? I think before long it will be excessively entertaining. A week to-day, my hero, we have the general conference. Things may move then, and move rapidly."

CHAPTER THREE

THE furred thing hung, swung almost, with a collar of thin wire round its neck. Its eyes, protruding horribly like those of a magnified fly, were rimmed round in red, scarlet with broken

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veins. A flicker of blood showed on the top of a greying tongue that trembled between oddly protruding teeth and a pair of hindlegs gave one last futile scampering scratch that caused a wheeze to sound in a choking throat.

And at that moment the first light of dawn glimmered in a late summer sky—the first light that picked out the eternal beauty of the crystal traceries of dew on grass, that filmed the spider's weaving into a gassamer wonder, that tinged the hips and haws of the hedgerow with the full, pure, scarlet glory of a maiden's blush.

Then for a moment it lit on tragedy, saw tragedy die, and suddenly a wisp of a dawn cloud stretched itself like a veil across the rising sun, and for a fleeting second the dew, and the dawn, and the whole wide world, lost its radiance. . . .

There was a plague of rabbits in England. Two hot summers and two mild winters had caused it. Principally the mild winters, which had failed to ensure the usual seasonal halt in the rabbit world's ardent habit of propagating its species.

They were a plague undoubtedly. It was remarkable, though, how the presence of this pestilence affected the various strata and substrata of humanity which go to make up England.

In any town—in London more particularly than anywhere else—Mrs. Jones, whose husband was a bus-driver and whose income was not gigantic, had to pay at least one shilling for the corpse of an animal that would just make a Sunday dinner for husband and family. In the country rabbit-catchers—certainly those who live by the sale of their proceeds and were not paid a wage by a long-suffering landlord—descended to the borderline of acute poverty. "Hopeless, trapping them," was their cry. "Lucky if we get sixpence a couple, and that don't pay for snares, time, labour, and cartage."

Those who were paid a wage trapped, plucked the dead carcasses from their snares, and slung them on to a meadow bank to rot. They burned on one estate twelve hundred rabbits in a week, and an unemployed miner who was walking from Rhondda to Kensington with the hope of singing *Land of my Fathers* in the streets at the end of the walk, cried at the sight and smell of it.

For a month or so letter columns in *The Field, Country Life,* and similar papers were topped each week with half a dozen letters asking and suggesting the best way of dealing with the situation.

Major-General Sir Heathcote Poult-Heathcote, M.P., of Chuckstock Park, Banbury, suggested cyanide. Someone else gas. Imperial Chemical Distributors, Ltd., brought out a special rabbit destructifuge. Tim Mayhew, who was a leading motorist, wrote how he gassed out a warren with the exhaust fumes of three "blown" Bentleys. He had coupled rubber piping on to each of their exhausts, inserted them down various holes, and revved up the three engines until the cars themselves must have imagined that they were lapping at Le Mans.

As usual, though, the *Daily Flare* fired the shot that really mattered. It was slow in taking up the question, for rabbits seemed a dreary subject, but the *Flare* was nothing if not thorough. When it took anything up it took it up. Therefore it sent its agricultural correspondent to Wiltshire and a shrewd statistician to the Ministry of Agriculture.

The former wrote a graphic eight hundred words which appeared under the facetious heading of "Bunny the Bugbear." The latter rooted out the inspiring news that something like a million and a quarter rabbits—dead, human consumption, for the use of—were being imported into England each month from Czechoslovakia, Austria, Silesia.

The *Daily Flare,* as a frankly democratic, protectionist, all-for-Empire pater, leapt at the news.

Five million rabbits being burnt in England with no market available, with five, ten, a hundred thousand homes in distress, areas on the borderline of starvation!

The situation was so absurd that even the Minister of Agriculture had to admit defeat. His suggestion that a tariff on imported rabbits would increase the price was met by a curt letter in *The Times*—the House was up—from Major-General Sir Heathcote Poult-Heathcote to the effect that if the Minister would use his office to ensure free transport, he and fifty thousand other landowners in England would guarantee to provide enough free rabbits to give half England nausea.

To which flagrant piece of Socialism the Game Dealers' Association, Fishmongers' Incorporated Guarantee Trust, the Butchers' Amalgamated Private Help Yourself Syndicate wrote bitter letters of protest to every paper and their political organization.

And the unemployed miner, who had hit

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Kensington at last, and had contrived to earn three shillings and threepence in a day's singing, had to pay one shilling and fivepence in a North Kensington eating-house for a plate of rabbit stew with vegetables.

Meanwhile, the last remains of the "furred thing" referred to previously were disintegrating moistly and stickily into the ground, for the drought of two years had gone and the skies had become leaden and rain-filled.

IT IS a long road and a dreary road and a strange road that follows the Little Ouse on its devious way from one part of Cambridgeshire towards its kindred shire of Norfolk. Major-General Heathcote Poult-Heathcote thought it more than that as he trudged in the half light of dusk along it, blaspheming to himself the while.

"Confounded fool I was ever to drive down without Jenkins. (Jenkins was his chauffeur.) . . . Damned infernal ignorant fool, Jenkins, not to have checked the car all over. . . . Good make of car, too. . . . What the devil right has it got to peter out here, miles from anywhere? . . . Damn it!" His shoes were hurting him on the nobbly road. "Damn the whole infernal countryside. Is there no living civilization?" he grunted querulously.

There was. A mile ahead a small, squat, hideously grotesque, dingy brick house jutted out on to the road, with a ten-feet drop into the fields behind it, and a pleasant view from its top windows of the still, grey waters of the Ouse on the other side of the road, and two feet below the road's level. A light twinkled in a window, and from the distance "H.P.H." could see now a swinging sign fixed to the wall.

"Thank God for something at last," he grunted, and then, slightly less miserable, fell to glancing to his off-side at the stretch of country that was growing dimmer and dimmer in the evening light.

"Damned depressing place this is, by Jove," he thought. "Reminds me of Flanders."

A quick eye and a far-seeing eye took in the lack of fences, the few straight, chess-board-square country roads. Lines of poplars, the endless dyke-bound fields, not fields really to the casual eye of an Englishman, endless expanses almost, with here and there the stubble slashed by the first turn of the plough, showing the black, evil, morbid colour of the rich loam.

Flat land, odd land, fey land, unbroken save by fringing poplars or a newly stooked stack and almost by his side—H.P.H. spied it suddenly—a traction engine, its fellow on the other side of a hundred-acre field, that sat up grimly sinister in the evening light like "tanks bogged at Passchendaele."

And then H.P.A. noticed the rabbits.

The road beneath his feet shelved as it does the whole weary length of its way deep down to the flat lands on its right—and the flat land near the bank was alive with rabbits.

"Damned funny country for rabbits," he thought. "Their burrows must be as damp as the cellars by the canal bank at Ypres. Hell of a lot of them, though. Infernal plague they are. God be praised, this cottage is a pub as I hoped. As like as not they won't have a telephone, but at least I can send a man surely to salvage the car and get me a lift to civilization."

The sign over his head creaked. Looking up he saw a crudely painted design of a grassed and dying fish, a pike possibly, mouth open, lying on its side.

Then as he turned to the door he read the name, "The Stranded Fish," and underneath it the name of the proprietor, Mr. Dixon Standaloft.

"Two funny sorts of names," he said, and opened the inn door.

A small fire flickered brightly in a minute black-leaded grate; an oil lamp lit up a dart-board, lit up the figure of General Sir Heathcote Poult-Heathcote, legs criss-crossed, glass of hot rum in his hand, seated by the fire talking earnestly to a canvass-legged countryman, the landlord of "The Stranded Fish," and his wife.

"You know," he was saying rather pontifically, "I am really rather pleased that whilst the garage could fetch my car they couldn't fetch me. It is good of you, Mrs. Standaloft, to put me up for the night. Jolly to sit down and talk naturally with real strangers and . . . ." suddenly his thoughts running wild— "Yours is a lonely country, isn't it, or don't you notice it?"

"Just the real country, master, as it was meant to be."

"By Gad, I know what you mean, no damned modern jerry-built villas, no London hobble-dehoys dashing along with their blatant, blasted cars, to ruin things. Oh yes, great country, real country, but lonely, surely, devilish lonely I should call it, like the northern half of the Aslient in mid-winter."

"Pilkem way, sir?" queried another man sitting in the shade of a corner, corduroy-legged trousers caked in mud.

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"You were there?" said H.P.H.

"Me and Dixon and Bob." He indicated another figure quietly sipping beer by a leaded window. "All of us three was there I fancy, sir."

MRS. STANDALOFT grinned and rose to her feet as four tongues loosed themselves in the leaven of unrestricted talk.

"Some more drinks, if you please, Mrs. Standaloft," said H.P.H. "I see we have old tales to swap."

"In a minute, sir. I have a hotty bottle to put in your bed and the fire to see to there. Maybe it will be better if I put a kettle on the hob by you and another sort of bottle near as well, with the sugar and lemon handy, then I'll leave you and not disturb you. Only don't make my Dixon too warlike, will you, sir?"

H.P.H. grinned and slapped Dixon Standaloft on the shoulder. It may have been the rum or the unreality of the situation, or that suddenly he had slipped a score of years from off his shoulders, but he grew natural for the first time for many years. And when, an hour later, Mrs. Standaloft popped her head into the room before going to bed, she saw a once familiar sight to many people's eyes—just an officer sharing a tot of rum with three "old sweats," all friends, all men, and all ready to knock the block off any tub-thumper who ranted about class distinction.

It was midnight when the four had drunk the last drop out of the bottle, and as H.P.H. opened the creaking front door he swayed a little.

"Gad, I'm tiddly, you know," he said to himself. "Mustn't do it, mustn't show it." And then aloud: "How many times, sergeant-major"—he was addressing one of the two labourers—"how many times didn't you try to get the adjutant or the second in command tight at the sergeants' concert in rest billets in the old days?"

"Rest billets!" he thought. His eyes lit on the dark loam land below him patched like a quilt in the moonlight, and then at the canal bank, and then at . . .

"God, it is eerie," he said, alcoholically sober for the moment. "The ramparts at Wipers, eh, sergeant-major: I've said that to myself once to-day already. Just like it, though, isn't it?

"Now what the devil is that moving down there?" He pointed out to where the bank cleft into the dark loam of the soil.

"Rabbits," said the sergeant-major. "We have a plague of them here. Never seen the like before. Council's going to help us to poison them, so I'm told. They need poisoning, the trouble they do, delving into our dykes and bringing them down. Why 'bor,' sir, I mean, they cleaned thirty acres of barley away on Mr. Huddingham's land clean as ever best hands could harvest it."

The cool air was revivifying H.P.M. He cleared his throat suddenly, slipped a note into two rather diffident hands, and said:

"Well, I'm off to bed. Yes, you must take it for old times' sake, I insist. And thank you both for so many drinks and for such a jolly evening. You say those things are rabbits? Hmph! They look more like sappers out wiring to me, or a listening party. But it doesn't matter, eh? not a bit these days, when there's nothing that need listening to. No mines to go up, nothing to fear, and nobody cares two damns for anyone who did the wiring or the listening in the old days. Well, good night and good luck. May we meet again soon."

He swung inwards and upstairs, singing in a husky voice a tune he hadn't sung for forty or so years.

Oddly enough the bowdlerized words fitted the quick march of the regiment he had commanded many, many years ago. Oddly enough, it was an omen, if only he had had the understanding to sense it.

* * *

The long lines of little figures scampered through the stubble, through ringing wet sugar-beet, knee-high mangels; little brown figures, eyes shining, teeth gleaming white, gay, reckless, for once care-free. They came from every degree of one half of the compass, and they converged, all of them, on to a patch of darkness in the clear September moonlight.

Three gnarled, titanic elms, freaks almost in the fenland, caused the patch. They stood side by side a hundred yards from "The Stranded Fish," and while by daylight they looked an odd contrast to the lines of poplars, at night they seemed suggestive. Moreover, since their roots were shallow, they spread into and under the river bank. They looked somehow top-heavy. They were.

The first files of the rabbits checked under the elms to receive their orders. They heard them from a big bouncing buck, who stood on the bole of one of the trees and said succinctly:

"Right, left, centre; top right, top left, top centre. You're from Puckenham, are you? Ah! that's right, 'The Forlorn Hope.' Bottom centre and dig for hell, heaven.

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and the Master. Arrange your own reliefs, you have had your orders already, most of you. Many of you may catch it, but remember, chaps, in 'The Isles' there are no traps, no snares, no shooting. All the preliminary work's been done. The bank is not a warren, it's fifty-five fox earths as well. Just dig, boys, dig deep and damn quickly."

Little teeth clipped together, long soft brown ears rose and fell, little feet scampered away. Lines came up seemingly endless and disappeared slowly like a tube train moving from out a station into its own particular tunnel. And still the big brown buck stamped and chucked out his orders and his inspirations.

* * *

Major-General Sir Heathcote Poult-Heathcote, having toasted his feet before the dying fire in his bedroom, looked rather frowningly at his feather bed—the rum was dying in him—wondered incuriously whether it was clean—lunged towards the window, pulled up a blue paper blind, and peered out.

For a minute his eyes failed to pick up things in the moonlight, then he peered intently, clapped his hands round his eyes, and then staggered back from the window.

He rubbed the back of a hand across his face and muttered: "Gad, I must be blind. Full as a tick. Haven't been really tight since I was Bob Tidmarsh's best man in nineteen twelve. Seeing things, I am. Thousands of damn things. Rabbits. Curse my soul, seeing rabbits. And I told everyone how to get rid of them. Cyanide, of course, nothing else like it. Gad, though, that rum must have been damned bad, or deuced good. Now curse me, I am not seeing anything more, sleep for me!"

He fell into bed, heaved an adipose posterior into a comfortable fold in the feather mattress, and said:

"More comfortable than I thought. Jolly funny night—jolly, really jolly. Lord, I'll have a head in the morning. Wish I had some Eno's with me," and lapsed into sleep.

Very naturally, in view of the surfeit in his brain, he dreamt. Very naturally, in view of the night's conversation, he dreamed of old familiarly unfamiliar things. He was in his dug-out, five hundred yards to the right of and behind the Bluff.

It was muddy and stinking and cold, for the brazier had gone out. Bishop, his adjutant, was dozing in front of him, and then suddenly an orderly came in mired to the belly, cold as charity, and as the orderly stumbled down the steps fifty thousand express trains rattled overhead.

"Damn! A raid," he said, and leapt his way up and out into a clear moonlight lit with a million flickers of flame, hellishly melodious, with whining, whispering, shrieking music.

The express trains howled at him and flung fragments of mud and brick at him as they passed. Then noise died, to be replaced by—God! thousands and thousands and thousands of brown-coated rabbits with entrenching tools in their hands who were surging over his front line, over the support lines—over . . . .

In his dream they seemed far more formidable than ever the Third Fusilier Battalion of the Prussian Guard had seemed at Ypres in nineteen fourteen.

"Bishop, we're done," he shouted. "Get back quickly, orderly, to Brigade, tell them the news. Where the hell are you, Bishop? Hell and Heaven, isn't anybody—can't anybody . . . ? "A trumpet blast like the voice of Pentecost sounded in his ears, the world rocked round him, he felt himself falling, falling, falling. He was hit, the line was gone, the regiment had failed, where the hell was the regiment? Where the hell was Bishop, where were the S.O.S. rockets? And then something hit him again on his head—"I am wearing my tin helmet, I know I am," were his last thoughts as he awoke.

His head was bleeding, his bed was broken, as were the walls of his room, and the moon shone through a hole in the roof over his head.

Moreover, the floor sloped at an angle of forty degrees, and there was someone crying somewhere, crying, bawling for help, though the voice was almost drowned in a roar like a football crowd filtering into a narrow lane after a cup tie. He stumbled to the door—it was open—and fell two feet before his own touched level ground again.

"What the hell's happened?" he shouted. And from a bedroom with a broken doorway he saw in the dim light the groping, panic-stricken figure of Mrs. Standaloft climbing towards him weeping and wailing.

"My Dixon, my Dixon! A brick's through his head. Lord save us!"

"Pull yourself together," he said quietly. "Dixon's hurt? I'll go and see to him." He fell forwards almost through a gaping floor as he moved.

"What's happened?" he thought. "What's happened?"

He checked his words. He was in Dix-

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on's room then and he did not check them at the sight of Dixon, who was past mortal help. The window was wide open, the glass broken, and outside, what was fenland once was now a giant river pouring and boring its grey muddy water, that lifted the black loam with its force, whirled it sideways and upwards, and then filtered over it in seething, frothing scum.

"God!" said Major-General Sir Heathcote Poult-Heathcote. "The bank's broken!" And suddenly and insanely: "Those rabbits, those damned rabbits. Stay here," he shouted to Mrs. Standaloft. "You're safe at least for the moment; the house will stand. I'm going to get the news through."

IT WAS an hour later when a tottering, sweat-blinded old man staggered into the nearest town, rapped at the cottage that was local headquarters of the county police, gave his name, and told his story. Thereafter a quiet East Anglian town set itself astir a long hour before dawn.

And with the first flush of helpers Major-General Heathcote Roult-Heathcote came too. "Damn you, sergeant, I am *not* hurt," he had said. His head was cut from one temple to the brow, but the blood had caked and, oddly enough, he had never noticed it before, but his left arm hung limp and loose. "Damn it, though," he insisted, "I am coming with you. How many cottages are there in danger? Hundreds! And if the bank goes in one place it may go anywhere else. God help them all, God help them all.

"Here we are, sergeant. Oh, my God, look at it!" This as a commandeered lorry halted as near as possible to a miniature Niagara Falls.

"How did you get over it, sir?" said the sergeant.

"There was a crust on top of it then. The river was bursting out as though through a drain. My God, though, sergeant, look at that lane, it's feet deep now, and it's, it's . . . " he peered down. The twisted body of a little girl floated down the flood water and swirled into a cul-de-sac caused by a tumbled elm.

As it swirled and settled it was joined by the limp and floating carcasses of a score of rabbits, one of whom was bigger than the rest, a giant buck who looked like the king of the rabbit world.

THEY made something of a hero of Major-General Sir Heathcote Poult-Heathcote in the national press the next day, and he deserved it.

To every reporter, though, whom he met he vouchsafed the words: "Damn your eyes," for he was little in the mood for heroics.

That was until Leslie Bishop, chief reporter of the *Daily Flare*, got in to see him in Littleport Hospital, and H.P.H. stuttered suddenly: "Gad! You're Bishop, aren't you? I dreamt about you last night, about the old days when you were my adjutant, and then I woke up to this ghastly horror. What on earth are you doing here now, though?"

Leslie Bishop told him, checked H.P.H.'s expostulations, extracted his story, said: "I won't be a fool, sir. I must, though, write about your heroism. Now for Heaven's sake don't throw your bed at me! And I must tell the world what you saw from your bedroom window."

Leslie Bishop was a wizard at cajolery. He cajoled H.P.H., and then he said very carefully, in answer to a question: "Yes, it is pretty bad. No one knows the real death-roll up to now. It's more than a hundred, though. The floods have spread and caught people in broad daylight, toppled their very houses down on top of them."

But for every human body that was retrieved—mud-spattered, blaspheming men raked out those of a dozen swollen rabbits. And when they eventually dammed the hole in the bank they dammed it over a sinking, swelling, smelling bank of rabbits that was fathoms thick and feet wide.

LESLIE BISHOP, legs crossed, whisky and soda by his side, sat ruminating happily by the fire in the lounge of a little country hotel. He was in that blissful condition—the personal property of your good reporter who has done his story, knows it is a good one and is at peace with the world.

"Have I exaggerated anything?" he thought. "By Jove, no; I have not stressed things far enough. God! There *is* something going on, something that utterly passes our understanding. I've sensed it ever since that skeleton at Cleobury. It's. . . ." He grunted, stretched out a hand to his glass and said: "Well, I wonder how they will splash it in to-morrow's paper? It's still worth the lead.

"Geeves, the coroner's words were dramatic enough to startle anyone to-day. He is lunching with me to-morrow; I'll get him to open his mouth more. Jove! For an aging reporter who has been twenty-five years in the Street I am behaving

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idiotically. I'm just itching to see what they'll do with the story. Just itching."

Leslie Bishop saw what they had done with it when he was called at nine o'clock next morning. He took one look at his copy of the *Daily Flare* and then ejaculated: "My holy aunt!" Thereafter, for a hard-bitten newspaper man, he behaved oddly. He left his morning cup of tea untouched, he didn't even glance at the housemaid, who was buxom, fair-haired, and jovial, and who grinned at him. Instead, he kept on repeating: "Heavens above! Well, I'm damned!"

He had every cause to be.

YOU can always be sure of a bumper crowd at the last big meeting of the year at Brooklands. Speed is one of the cardinal factors in life to-day, and life goes faster at Brooklands than anywhere else in England. Sometimes more so in the paddock than on the course.

But at any rate Brooklands is Brooklands, and when George Stevens, motoring correspondent of the *Daily Flare*, humped his car into a corner of the members' enclosure, jumped out almost into the arms of—to use his own words—"Hell, boys, what a nugget," he found time to exclaim to the small, wizened little man who followed him out of the car: "Terrific crowd you've got here. Never seen a bigger one. How do you do it, Fizzer?"

Fizzer—who really *was* Brooklands both in official and unofficial capacities—chortled back: "Good racing, George, old boy. . . ."

"It is good to-day," interpolated George. "Sorry, I'm interrupting."

"And Sir Geoffrey Meredith, fresh from Utah, three hundred miles an hour under a scalding sun, going to race in an ordinary, blow-the-car-up-and-burst-it sort of race. He draws, you know, George, draws the mass of women and the business and the advertising. I bet you won't be able to squeeze even your long pointed nose into a vacant space round the Leaf which he's driving today. And he hasn't even arrived yet."

"He's a good sort, though," said George, "devilish good. If I were him I would have given it up years ago. Let's go into the Paddock and see how things are shaping."

The Paddock at Brooklands is full of smells and noise; smells of exhausts, smells of burnt Castrol, smells of every unknown exotic feminine scent, and the noise of revving engines is occasionally eclipsed by the strident voices of hysterical women who gasp out to some white-coated figure: "Oh, darling, do tread on it deathlessly, for my sake, my sweetness." Lovely women! diviner motor cars!

Fizzer was quite right, though, in his remark to George. You could not get near Geoffrey Meredith's car. As it happened, Geoffrey had arrived three minutes before they strolled towards it, and was now peering over an open bonnet in the empty-ended cow-stall which is the home of the richest car in the world that goes racing at Brooklands.

George and Fizzer struggled towards the car.

Said a feminine voice from a scarlet slit of a mouth: "Don't push."

"I *am* sorry," said George. "Press."

"Don't lecture me. Press if you like, but don't push."

"I should hate to get that close."

"How dare you!" The blonde beauty's voice faltered suddenly. An accidental gap opened in the crowd: Geoffrey, looking up, suddenly caught sight of Fizzer and George and shouted:

"Hullo, you two cock sparrows. Come into the office."

And as the pair moved forward, the girl touched George on his shoulder and said hesitatingly:

"I'm sorry, so sorry. Do you know him?"

"Yes," said George. "He's all right."

And then a mechanic in the next cow-stall started up a blown "Bug," and a wave of exhaust smoke puffed virulently into the blonde beauty's eyes.

Said George, five minutes later, as he strolled with Geoffrey and Fizzer to the start of the first Mountain Handicap:

"You know you're a blooming fool to go on driving. Sooner or later you'll cop it; they all do, all of them." He ran over names with tragic regularity. "And you needn't. You're rich enough, you bloated old plutocrat. You've captured every record worth capturing in the world. Why on earth do you go on?"

Geoffrey smiled a quizzical smile from a greyish lined face.

"I'll give you a story, George, for your stinking rag. I'm not going on any more. To-day's my last day's racing. I want to have a cut at the Gold Cup, just this once more, and then very definitely I've finished. I had meant to chuck it after Utah, but when I got home I felt I had to race once more before I quitted—and this is the once more."

"The little more," said George, "and how much it is. Well, damn it, my congratula-

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tions anyway on your return to sanity. You know at least what I think and have written about—well, we'll call it your past now. Lord, I'll stretch myself and pull your leg into the bargain when I write your 'obit' for to-morrow.

"Hullo! Flag's up—they're off. Hark at that little Austin whining its essential insides out. That's Cobe in the 'Bug,' isn't it? Look at that Alfa skidding—and hark to the crowd." From the members' Hill and from the Paddock, and everywhere, came a whining "wheeou," like a score of super-chargers at full revs—the expectant, whispered, yet intensely audible sound of an ecstatically thrilled crowd.

Geoffrey, Fizzer, and George watched the race from the track, saw a howling, humming Midget snake past first, with Cobe in the Bugatti at its tail, and turned back to the Paddock to be passed by one after another of a host of now slowly moving, spluttering, angry cars, the participants in the race.

Odd helmeted heads turned to Geoffrey and said: "Hullo, old cock. Good to see you again." Begrimed hands waved a greeting.

"You're a national hero," said Fizzer.

"A national disaster, you mean," muttered George, as an Aston Martin, driven by a party girl, checked for a moment at Geoffrey's side, and the girl said:

"Darling! Darling! Too lovely to see you again."

THERE were nine cars in the Gold Cup, ranging from Cobe's gigantic Delage to a resuscitated blown Bentley, and interspersed by Geoffrey's straight eight blown Leaf, which legend said could do a hundred and sixty if and when she wanted to.

And since all motor cars—and racing cars in particular—have their own language, the music they made as they were wheeled into line and sat side by side in the Paddock was illuminating.

The Delage coughed like a giant with phthisis, and Alfa hummed almost the same tune that used to emanate from the "RAF" wires of that pterodactyl of an aeroplane—a BE2C—when the pilot of the machine was diving up to the limit: while the Leaf just buzzed like the swarm that follows the queen bee.

A bell rang, nine cars were pushed forward and then jinked out on to the straight, and some forty thousand pairs of eyes watched them ecstatically.

There were other eyes watching, oddly gigantic eyes, protruding eyes, and they could have been numbered in legions. They were present in the cut-down spinney near the bridge where on a June day you can hear nightingales clucking in unison with the passing cars. They glistened and goggled and grew wider and wider, from beneath the stunted bushes, from the scrub by the fork, from wherever it was possible for a relatively minute individual to lie hidden.

"Are you ready?" shouted the human voice of the starter to the occupants of nine sleek, grotesque, sputtering motor cars panting on the starting line.

The starter's voice was drowned by the hum of engines. It reached the drivers, perhaps, but was irrelevant. They waited not for spoken words, but for a falling flag.

"Contact!" shouted another voice, an authoritative little voice.

"Contact, sir," came a myriad answering murmurs.

"Remember, take off by flights, join into squadrons, get your height and your speed and your distance and then, Squadron-Commanders, remember, hell dive each on to his target and make it a hell dive. You others follow like hell, too. Ready? Then rev up now."

A man standing on the Members' Hill by a bunch of flaming gorse said: "Lord! Someone's car is buzzing like anything." The girl at his side lisped out:

"They haven't started yet. You can hear them phutting away on the line."

The starter's flag fell away out of sight from the hill. Nine cars howled, thirty-six tires screamed, and a splinter of concrete facing flicked up and slit a mechanic's mouth into that of a shark.

"Go," whispered a little voice from a patch of snowberry. "Go—and go quick."

A quarter of a million wings passed him, a quarter of a million lemon-yellow, black, and gold bodies took the air, and the man standing on top of the Members' Hill suddenly shouted to the lady by his side:

"God, Freda, look at that! Bees swarming from those rhododendrons behind you. My sainted aunt! That was the buzzing I heard, and I thought it was Meredith's Leaf," and then, tone changing suddenly as the noise of buzzing bees was drowned by the screaming engines: "Lord! Look at Ivaninsky with that Maserati—going by with only inches from the top to spare. There's Cobe, and Geoffrey—good old Geoffrey. I wonder if the Leaf will stand up to it this time? Hell, what a noise they're making! Miles away from us they are now," and then, rather quietly, "I wonder where those bees are."

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He had need to wonder.

GEORGE STEVENS and Fizzer were standing rather nearer the finishing line than the Members' Bridge in the rank grass that fringes the track when the last car of the nine—it was Appleby's O.M.—hurtled by on the first lap.

"Well, that's one out of it, anyway," said George. "Blown up, cracked an exhaust manifold. See that cloud of smoke over there?"

"It isn't smoke," said Fizzer. "Good God, what is it? It's alive! It's twisting round his head. Lord of Mercies, look at it!"

The O.M. swerved suddenly down from the railway embankment, crashed a wire fence, and flopped into a dyke.

It hung there a moment, a twisted wreck of sky-blue metal and still throbbing engine, then a sheet of flame lapped out from the crumpled body, licked backwards, found a leak in the center of its supply, and the flame died in a pall of black smoke, to be reborn in a thousand dancing devil-flamed tongues.

"Run like hell, Fizzer," shouted George, and as they ran a bell tolled loudly, persistently, from the distant aeroplane sheds.

"God! That can't be for us," thought Fizzer as he ran. "Has someone else crashed?"

In the distance he saw a few flea-like figures breaking all rules, risking their live, climbing across the track up to the top of the bank.

"Someone has, by God!"

Neither George nor Fizzer had reached Appleby's burning wreck and Appleby's toasting body—though they could smell the latter; it was like bad pig being cooked on a grid—when a howling drone caught them and Geoffrey Meredith, green Leaf going like the wind, screamed past them. And as its scream died to a whine both of the pair of very sane, hard-headed individuals are still prepared to-day to swear that they heard another scream—Geoffrey's, rising louder than the howl of his supercharger: "Keep away, damn, hell, oh my. . . ."

The green Leaf staggered a moment and a stranger would have said that she was top-heavy, for over her driver's head hung a black funereal cloak of something, something utterly inane; a gigantic cloak that shredded minute fragments of itself as it moved, but that still seemed not to dwindle in size.

"Do you see it?" shouted Fizzer.

"Them?" said George, "they're bees, swarming! Look at Geoffrey! Look at his car! Look at his head—look at. . . ."

The green Leaf gave up scuttering in zigzags. As if controlled by Titan hands it straightened its course. As if driven with a throttle fixed full open, it leapt forward suddenly and drove, screaming a dirge, down the railway straight, up the banking at the end, over it in a cloud of dust. And as it dropped headlong, a little cloud lifted—it had grown smaller by now—lifted, rose gently into the clear, clean air, and fled away.

"Geoffrey!" shouted George, words dying on his lips with horror.

"God!" shouted Fizzer, and then both voices checked, both men halted their run for a second by a blaze of heat, a twisted mass, in the centre of which Appleby's white leather helmeted head was slowly crinkling and turning black.

"Dead, poor devil. Damn you, George, don't go and kill yourself trying to get him out," said Fizzer. "Nobody and nothing can save him. Look at these, though. Look what you're walking on. A carpet of bees. Bees and wasps and God alone knows what else.

"What's happened, George, what the hell has happened?" Hysteria had all but wrapped itself round him when a grey Rolls howled up, screamed with breaks flat on to a halt, and a voice yelled:

"Come on, you two. Stand on the step. You can help perhaps. Oh, it's you, Fizzer, is it?" And the speaker was the Chairman of the track. "What's happened, you say? Hell's been let loose. Is Appleby dead? Then, that's five; no six, I believe; three over the bank, two in flames, and poor little Pethway stung to death—yes, stung, blast you. Here we are. Run like hell. Pray God we shan't be the first to find that Meredith has made the roll up to seven."

They were not the first, but the roll was seven.

Two gangers from the line had tumbled headlong down the granite fringed slope of the embankment, leaped barbed wire and whins, and were the first to pull Geoffrey Meredith from out his seat. His neck was broken cleanly and accurately, but his face looked as though it had been pushed backwards and forwards for a week through a three-foot thicket of blackthorn in May. It was riven and swollen, scarlet spotted, needle pricked, blood flecked, a travesty of humanity.

They had carried his body a distance away from the wrecked shell of his car,

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been joined by a dozen or so of other helpers, as George and Fizzer arrived, but the small group, instead of remaining solemnly still, were leaping sideways and backwards, and slapping intentionally hard hands on all parts of their bodies.

"Mind out," a man's voice shouted. "You'll get. . . ."

Fizzer, running forward in front, suddenly saw a fat, bulbous insect driving towards him driving between his eyes, clapped a hand on it in fury, felt a red-hot needle sear one eyeball, and then threw himself to the ground with the pain of it. . . .

Leslie Bishop read all this in his hotel in Littleport; read it, as has been said before, to a tune of bewildered blasphemy that was perhaps forgivable on this occasion.

Then he drank a cup of tepid tea, lay back in his bed, eyes sweeping the whitewashed ceiling, and muttered:

"Now the paper, every paper's got to face facts, has got to realize that there is a limit to coincidence, that there must be . . . " his lips trembled with emotion—"my God! What must there be?"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE *Daily Flare* did not have even the ghost of a chance of escaping facts.

Brooklands was the impossible realized. The next day they had to face facts with a vengeance, facts so alarming, so incredible that they not only disorganized the traffic of London, but dumbfounded the Metropolitan police, and even called for very drastic action by two companies of a battalion of one of His Majesty's Regiments of Foot Guards.

The day was a Sunday. One of those sublime Sundays that herald the first quickenings of autumn, with a clear blue sky overhead, and the sun at noon-day as warm as red August, but with just the faintest whisper of winter in the air to keep the world on its toes.

Just that divine whisper of nature that sings as the year's cycle swings round to its end: "There is no death. The woods are golden now; to-morrow there will be no leaf; the day after green shoots and sapfilled boughs, and you, too, brother: the hair is greying, the limbs are more weary, to-morrow there may be but dust, but in the Beyond. . . ."

A grand day, indeed that made little Peter Folliott, aged six, with a Cupid's bow of a mouth and sandy hair whisking over his head, leap from his pre-breakfast bath, bounce into his parents' bedroom, and jump unannounced on to the satin eider-downed bed in which his parents were sipping early morning tea and chuckling over the Sunday papers.

The chuckles were not due to the nature of the stories printed in the various respectable edifices of public opinion. To be true, Peter's father had been lying five minutes previously in bed, forehead creased, reading and rereading every available account of what the Sundays called the "Brooklands battlefield." The chuckles were really inspired by the fact that Peter's one and only father happened to be a man of some national significance, and that the papers had chosen to pick on a mid-week activity of his to make play with either in cartoons, political notes, or the letter columns.

"Peter, you young rascal, you've upset my tea," said the Right Honourable Francis Folliott, P.C., M.P., D.S.O.—the latter title was usually forgotten, though it was the only appendage to his name that he cared about. "Don't you realize that you have upset the equilibrium of the Minister of Agriculture a thousand times more than all these newspapers have done?"

With a gesticulatory wave he banished all the papers on to the floor to make way in a crook of his arm for a bouncing Peter, who settled down by the side of the Rt. Hon. Francis Folliott and his quite unnecessarily pretty wife.

"Mum," said Peter, "don't let Daddy forget. He promised to-day! We are all going there, aren't we, and isn't it a lovely day, too?"

"I haven't forgotten, young fellow. We are going to lunch there and then we'll drag you round all afternoon. Does that satisfy you?"

"It does, Daddy, oh, it does. And can we see. . . ?"

A hand knocked at the door, a feminine voice said: "Excuse me, is Master Peter there? He bolted from the bathroom."

Peter bounced off the bed, shouted: "Here I am, Miss Taylor. I had you well that time. We are going to-day, hurray, hurray!" and fled out, the door crashing behind him.

Said Francis Folliott to Sonia: "A grand kid, isn't he? You won't be bored, will you, darling? We can get a presentable lunch in the Fellows' dining-room. Lord! I haven't been there for years myself, and I am supposed to know all about animals."

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He checked suddenly. "Animals; good God! what the devil's happened to them these days?"

Sonia, red hair shining on a snow-white pillow-case, smiled affectionately back. "Darling, I gave Peter for his birthday *The Wind in the Willows*, the sweetest book that has ever been written. You must have read it. Do you remember the chapter on Pan?" She frowned pensively a moment, to continue: "When you are puzzling your head over figures and quotas and tariffs and the million cows and pigs there are or should be in England, don't you ever think what could happen if *they* all thought and acted in a human way, if they set out to take their revenge for all we have done to them, and set out under a leader who was"—her voice dropped—"almost divine?"

Francis Folliott chuckled and leaped from the bed. "You're divine, darling, a divine little romancer. What an idea, though; make a novel perhaps. I'm for a bath now."

HIS name was Hamet, and by an unwillingly acquired profession he was an idler. He idled all day in a cage six feet square by eight feet high outside the Monkey House at the Zoo, and his was a remunerative idleness. Outside his cage was a chained-on box which solicited subscriptions for the upkeep of his home and the homes of a thousand other animals. It was chained on to a railing, not from fear of his attentions, but of those of the slightly less moral individuals who came to giggle and goggle at him daily.

Because so many people looked at him and laughed at him a number of them felt compelled to place a penny, or even a sixpence, in the box before they went on their way chuckling.

"Lor', 'Arry, did you ever see such a sight, red, blue, and yellow like the raynbough."

"Gawd, yes, just like Bill's eye was after I copped him one in the market."

"You copped Bill on the eye though, ducky."

Or alternatively, as it happened half an hour before luncheon on the day concerned.

"No, Peter, he's an ugly old fellow. Come on, old chap, come and lunch. . . ." and *sotto voce*, and the voice was that of the Rt. Hon. Francis Folliott—"Lord! What a beast! I wonder they have him here. Sonia, you little witch, you are giggling. I am too old to giggle and I have got to be respectable, but if you go on any more I will steal your make-up box and come bouncing into bed one night like—our friend."

Hamet, with a piece of banana in his hand, looked with a steely eye at them for a moment, then he bent down, long arms outstretched, picked up a piece of cork at the bottom of his cage and flicked it very deliberately, or so it seemed, out through the bars and sailing through the air so that it hit the silken top-hat of Francis Folliott with a ping like a .22 bullet makes when it hits a beech-tree fifty yards away.

"Damn," said Francis, "who the devil did that?"

"Cutta, cutta, cutta," said Hamet.

Sonia laughed. "He doesn't like you, darling. He's sensitive about . . ."

"Little witch. A nice pair you are, you and he. We'll go and lunch."

Hamet sat back after his outburst, but his chitterings had had their effect.

Even Aphrodel, king of all the vultures, Then, bile yellow-red eyes gloating, he lis- high, curved iron cage, heard the chatter passing to and fro and clicked the glossy, ghastly curved upper segment of his beak down on to the lower with a grinding, grating sound.

"What's disturbed Hamet?" he thought. Then, bile yellow-red eyes gloating, he listened to the words that were whispering everywhere, to the whispering sounds that came from nowhere, out of nowhere, in a sudden pregnant silence, in a colony which is never one to be silent long.

"Nothing the matter! Just the opportunity—be ready, that's all. The orders are out. Bill, Hadji, and Moocha will start the racket.

"What's Hamet saying . . . ?" thought Aphrodel, to listen again intently.

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"Remember, some of you may get home. You feathered fowl, at any rate. But before you try—and remember the orders are not mine, remember whose they are—join in the racket:

"Tear and rip and bite and gnaw,
Use your talons like a saw.
Bloody entrails make a claw.
Ours the prison, theirs the life!"

"NOW just one more little lady and gentleman, please. You, sir, come on up, sir, mind the step, sir, now that's right, sir. Squeeze in, sir, just by the little girl in red. All set now? Well, then, just try and imagine you're in India, sunny India, blistering hot India. You're going out tiger shooting on top of old Moocha. We are not in the Zoo any longer, but in thick jungle grass nearly as high as Moocha's shoulder. I beg your pardon, sir, of course I know you, sir, knows you from the cartoons in the papers if nothing else, Mr. Folliott.

"Your son, sir, aboard? Give them all a special ride? Of course I will, sir." Hand met hand and a coin passed. "Thank you, sir, very good of you sir. Your boy that one by the girl in red? Like you, sir, very like you, sir. Now then, all of you young ladies and gentlemen hold on tight please, we're off. Ho! Jat! Moocha!"

The slate-grey, dreamy-eyed Indian elephant, who had been standing motionless while a wooden howdah on its back was slowly being filled with children, responded to his name.

A giant, grizzled, near front foot lifted itself, a slight lurch and Moocha had padded forward a step. It was a slightly longer stride than was usual, and it caused the howdah to lurch a fraction, so that the little girl in red shouted shrilly: "Oh, I'm going to fall."

"Steady, Moocha," shouted Ben Avers, the keeper, who knew all the elephants in England, but had never known one in its own land. Had he known he would have noticed the slight stream of discharge running from Moocha's eyes and been bewildered and then affrighted at the sight.

Moocha did not steady. He took a further lurch forward, quickened his pace almost into the semblance of a trot, so that Avers had to break into a run.

"Hi, Moocha!. Hi, steady now," he shouted. And Moocha did steady for one moment. Then he twisted round a trunk, wrapped it slowly and silently round the body of Ben Avers, lifted him into the air as an angler lifts a fly on the end of his cast, dumped him down on the ground again, and then took a slow step forward.

There was a sickening squelch and the squelch seemed to inspire Moocha. He broke into a canter.

Ahead, a hundred yards ahead, were the outdoor cages of the lion house. As he lolloped forward he trumpeted once, and his peal was taken up and re-echoed by his brethren, Bill and Hadji, who were also bearing the same precious loads of human offspring.

It was taken up and echoed by a host of other voices, deep-throated voices, baying voices, howling, yelling, screaming voices.

Crash! Moocha jinked to one side, sidestepped, and bent his body. The howdah on his back hit the iron bars of a lion cage, crumpled and splintered. A dozen shrill, hysterical children's voices died, four diminutive bodies squelched against the railings and toppled to earth. The blood ran down the railings, down the howdah, down Moocha's back, and Moocha's trunk touched it.

There was blood, his own, across his eyes, and blood not his own trickling now down his sides. Also his mates were yelling their encouragement and desire a few yards from him. And then Moocha went "Must" entirely.

He ripped and he broke and he tore the remnants of the howdah frame, and his trunk swayed like a flail as it searched for and found the occupants. It found little Peter Folliott and spun him out into the segment of a circle high in the air, so that he fell with a thud on the concrete and lay, horribly like an over-ripe strawberry flung against a pane of glass.

He twisted and he tore, trod and stamped, spluttered and screamed, blew out his belly until the howdah's girth broke, and then smashed the wooden frame to bits in fury.

The red light died in his eyes for a moment, the cunning of the whole world grew in them. He wrapped his trunk around an iron bar, put the whole of his giant strength and weight behind it, and pulled, while a lion and lioness roared in delight. The concrete gave in stuttering cracks, as a bar went and another bar.

Kenya, and Joan, leonine prides of the Zoo, jumped out into freedom, almost, so it seemed, kissed Moocha's twisting trunk and—obeying orders—sped off on their purpose.

SONIA FOLLIOTT and the Rt. Hon. Francis Folliott ran screaming together to pick up what little there remained of

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Peter, only for Sonia to fall fainting over the hideous travesty of what once was a child.

And as they ran the Zoo seemed to be filled with running people, screaming people, mad people.

And not only people.

The work, once begun, was easy to continue. "Too easy," bellowed Hadji, as he ripped the railings away that allowed two rhinos to gallop into freedom.

"Deathly easy," screamed Bill, as he smashed the glass of the Reptile House, carried the door away on his shoulders, and pounded his way through, round, and out, breaking, breaking, and letting free.

Hamet, with his variegated posterior, still sat in his cage. It was the seat of wisdom and the Commander-in-Chief.

"No one will bother about me as yet," he thought. "I am safe, they will think, and as long as they think that I can still be the main wireless office.

"Moocha," he whispered, "you are not 'Must' really, you fool. Remember your orders. Let out the eagles and the vultures. Here, you rhinos, you are strong enough. Burst open the Monkey House. Hadji, down to the inner tiger cage. They have a man-eater there; he came only three months ago. No one has seen him as yet. Good! That's good, you rhinos. The monkeys are out. Now then, my brethren, to the monkey hill and loose the baboons. Some of you to the Mappin Terraces, pull down the keepers, get their keys. You have enough knowledge to use them. Let out the bears. Then pull down any keeper anywhere and get his keys and loose anything, anything, and quickly mind, quick as you can.

"Orders, orders, everyone," he chattered. "Loose anyone captive near you, those of you who can. You others kill, kill. But don't kill the red-haired woman whose pup is lying dead by Kenya's old home. She's mine, and in the fullness of time I will attend to her. Meanwhile, the nearest of you come and loose me now."

A little grey monkey obeyed the order. Hamet scrambled out, scratched a hairy chest, and, with the grey monkey by his side, paddled down toward the lion house.

"What a sight!" he grunted, "By Pan, what a sight! Everything is loose. Steady, my friend." This as a wart-hog brushed by. "Steady. Use your tusk on that fat old woman over there. By Pan, look at that!" This to the little grey monkey. "Look at friend python embracing a buxom dame. Do you hear the bones going? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

A shadow fell overhead and hovered. Hamet looked up and saw a black-beaked condor hovering on its ten-feet wingspread and queried: "Good hunting, friend?"

"Red blood and eyes, red blood. Oh, better this than ever I dreamed of." A blast of air drove into Hamet's face as the giant wings moved into steady flight again.

There were some three thousand people in the Zoo at the time. When they came to count them up afterwards they found some twelve hundred bodies torn, trampled, eyeless, limbless, hideously mutilated.

No one ever found the remains of the Rt. Hon. Francis Folliott, though Hamet before he died could have told the world where they were. Sambra, a tiger, had enjoyed the top half of the body, only being disturbed by the stiffness of a white butterfly collar: while the remainder had given intense delight to a pair of lynxes, a red fox, and two timber wolves.

They found Sonia, though. She was in Hamet's arms and Hamet had a leer on his face which made the terror on hers seem ludicrous in comparison.

Hamet had been shot by a lone keeper who had attempted to stem the impossible, only to be tossed sky-high by Moocha the moment afterwards.

But with Hamet's death all law was lost for a while. The wild world ran wild, but not so wild as the remnants of humanity that fought and trampled on each other by the exit gates.

Two puff adders, a drait, and a cobra had stationed themselves in pursuance to orders at one of the gates, and for a while they enjoyed themselves.

Then, since killing was so easy, and orders were lacking, they slithered off on their own and were perhaps the first of that incredible invasion of London.

At any rate, a minute after they sidled out, the barriers broke—some say that Hadji was there and did the breaking—and while frantic humanity surged out the jungle, too, followed suit, echoing its rejoicing to the heavens, encouraging each other, in blasts and bellowings or soft intensive whispers.

A girl driving a red sports car on the north side of Regent's Park may have been the first eyewitness of this impossibility. At least, though, she could never swear that she was, for Bahan, a buffalo, tumbled her car sideways and in the crash a splinter of broken wind-screen slit her face and her eyes.

A policeman saw a driving, scuttering tide of wild animals approaching, ran for

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his life, was nearly knocked into the Regent's Canal by the flick of a crocodile's tail, found a house, stormed through the door and dialed "The Yard" frantically. Thereafter the words sped and the requisite action was taken.

But when the first reporter—it was once again Leslie Bishop of the *Flare*—had forced his way into the front rank of a squad of guardsmen, rifles bayoneted and loaded, blocking one of the roads, his first vision of what had happened was of a paralyzed body of a black panther who lay dying, shot through the back, with a woman's arm still clutched in bared, bloody teeth.

THE little man came over the hills, and he was very garrulous. He sang as he hopped and jumped and ran, strange runic, the pictish lines that woke the heather and the earth from slumber and caused the grass to thicken in a world without a wind.

A man lying in earshot might not have reacted to the tune, although it could have been taken to be a parody on a popular musical comedy song of the day.

For the little man was chanting:

"In olden days they loved the little folk,
Ho, now anything goes.
They sacrificed and seared their little souls
To us whom nobody knows."

"By ash and oak, they don't know now, perhaps, but they're beginning to realize, and we'll teach them understanding soon. Hey-day, what a day!"

Then he checked on the topmost height of a typical Border Beacon, checked his pacings as well, and a whisper went forth.

Poor Peter Medley was quite mad, ever since the day that a splinter of shell had removed half his scalp on the Hindenburg line and left him lifeless almost and certainly vacant to endure such life as was left to him. He had been an ardent Liberal in the days of the pre-war political era. Which may have accounted for the fact that he quoted day in and day out such odd, insane phrases as "Homes for Heroes," and chanted them to the tune of *Keep the Home Fires Burning,* or, as he would term it occasionally, "The Marconi Bubble."

It was nothing odd, though, for poor Peter to wake up singing in his cubicle in the early hours of the morning, which may have accounted for the fact that Sister Agnes, going the round, failed at first to notice anything different in Peter's babble of confused melody.

It was perhaps quite understandable. Only a very few individuals could have differentiated between the words of custom and the words of the moment that Peter was singing to the same tune:

"Read you orders clearly,
Hold to them so dearly,
Read your orders inside out,
Then move at once.

"Check for naught or no one,
Be prepared for red fun,
Jest and jape and rip and take,
'Til the work is done."

It should be said that someone had once sent Peter to the war with the tune of *Keep the Home Fires Burning* in his mind. But the words carried out through the open door and the window across the grass enclosure to where five milk-laden she-goats, kept for the use of consumptive patients, were lying together in a wicker-covered pen.

"Don't," said Sister Anne. "Don't please, my dear," stroking a fevered forehead.

"Do—though by Pan it's incredible," muttered the most venerable mother amongst the goats, as the words reached her. And, muttering, she hefted up her forelegs and lowered her head.

The hour then was just dawn, a shade after dawn.

* * *

The little figure on the hilltops stood lyrically silent a moment. A grey autumn mist rose and folded back from a quiet dale. There was a grey, squat house half-hidden in the trees beneath him and a blackcock scurried over the wasting bracken and tired heather down to the half-ploughed stubble fields of the valley. A dozen hunters in the stables to the right of the house whickered suddenly. Thirty couples of hounds added their voices, and a door slammed as the kennel huntsman emerged to quiet them.

The mist lifted, showed distant fields flecked with cattle, showed a legion of black-faced sheep quartering the falling slopes over which Pan stood musing.

"Peace, the peace that passeth all understanding," he said wistfully. And then passion ousting kindliness, "A fat lot of peace they have ever given us."

A little lilt of music sang through the laden air, a golden symphony of grace cavorted down to his side from the heights of heaven, and a golden eagle—the Border had not known one for a hundred years—stood, elegance deified, by his side.

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"Us, Master?" The words trickled out like a hill stream does over a shallow bank of gravel.

"Yes, my friend. And to save time 'tell the world again.' I have been telling them these last five minutes. Tell all. But you know your orders, friend of my heart. No, not orders now—wishes."

"I tell, Master." Heavy wings lifted a heavy body lightly in the air, and it is significant that the blackcock who had been preening himself did not start in fright, and that even the youngest lamb in all those autumn-hued hills did not quiver or quake at the sight of the hovering body over him, or at the words.

* * *

It began—but it is hard to say where it began.

Some people say that old William Tickle, rising a moment after dawn in a Devonshire farm and going to loose a pedigree Gloucester Spot boar from its sty, was the first. Certainly his master—William was cowman, pigman, and handyman combined—found him ere a red sun had lit the bottom of the valley in which the village clustered, and found him cleanly bitten through the throat with that slewing sideways bite that a boar has.

Certainly his master had to run like a cutter before a gale to reach his own front door just in time to bang it behind him against the oncoming fury. Tom Holybeary, William's master, lived to tell the tale and therefore made much of it. Others were not so lucky.

There are several million head of cattle in England, more sheep, perhaps, not so many pigs, not quite so many horses. One thing is certain; that on or shortly after dawn each and every one broke down stall doors or stable boxes, burst through fences, rooted up restraining wire, maimed some of themselves, killed some of themselves, in doing so, but left a clear way open for the rest.

Isolated instances of their actions are multitudinous.

A traveller in Boseto stockings—he was an ardent youth with a desire to make good, hence he had driven all night in order to save hotel bills and reach York early—a traveller in silk stockings driving a dilapidated, second-hand Morris down the Fosse Way, suddenly saw a holocaust of about eighty red, fawn, black, white, and blue beasts lurching towards him, tails swinging, the road pulpy behind them. The traveller jammed on all brakes, screamed loudly, and was lifted, car and self, into the ditch which borders that old Roman road, and quietly obliterated beneath intentionally hurtful bovine feet.

It may, of course, have been coincidence that this incident occurred by a little wayside grove where an ardent antiquarian, Professor Somervale Maxwell, had decreed recently in print that a statue to Pan used to be reverenced in the days when the Third Legion first moved from Vectis to the Wall. Somervale Maxwell, though, was unfortunately unable to express his opinion on this at a later date.

He was a benign, *dulce ridentem dulce loquentem,* member of a past age, and since he had been born and brought up in the strictest of Victorian tenets, he had modelled his life on hard rules and kept to them.

One of them was to rise and praise God with the dawn, the other was a very definite determination to ignore all things modern and remain true to the beliefs and customs of a long dead era.

Both of them helped to cause his untimely exit from the world.

He rose when warm, wet rainclouds were weeping over his little Warwickshire village, and heard Bucephalus, the cob whom he drove everywhere, endeavouring to batter down the doors of his loose-box.

"Eheu fugaces!" said Somervale Maxwell as he trotted out to the stable, gum-boots

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flopping over bare feet, his nightshirt ruckling up under a waterphoof. "Oh, Bucephalus, you rascal. Alexander himself would be troubled by you." Actually speaking he never enounced the "you". The word was on the tip of his tongue as his hand rested on the bolt of Bucephalus's box, and then the next moment a hoof had shivered the door and sheared an inch off the scalp and two inches off the face of a very erudite professor who, had he lived, might have been able to explain many things.

BUCEPHALUS, the blood warm on his off-hind, sniffed and whinnied with the ecstasy of life. Then he scampered forth, tore his brisket on a fragment of wood in doing so, saw an old goat—Mrs. Maxwell believed in goat's milk—tethered near the lawn, kicked her staple free, and said: "Come on."

He cantered, a clipping clopping, rather clumsy chestnut cob growing long in the tooth and certainly very rough in the coat, but with inspiration working in him, a horse of a god's dream.

At the corner of the lane from the house he ran into half a dozen blood hunters, bolted from the stables at The Hall a mile up the road.

Radnut—a bay gelding by Jackdaw out of Holly Leaves—gave him enthusiastic greeting.

"Any luck? One? Oh, good, Bucephalus. You lead us. We are six and we have only two between us. Two grooms, little fellows they were, too."

They swept down the road, Bucephalus in front, at a steady trot, for all the world like a little fat infantry colonel leading the cream of the world's cavalry.

At the bottom of the lane Michael Purves, who was due in his office at Leamington by nine o'clock, but who had been spending the night surreptitiously drinking in the local inn, and who was now cranking up his car, saw the cavalcade, gave one gasp, and never gave another. Radnut sliced two inches out of the vertebrae of his neck, and Polesius, a gray mare, aged but still capable of jumping Aintree, jumped anything but lightly on his chest.

Now it happened that a woman with whom Michael Purves had been talking at the inn, had a brother who was a reporter on the Leamington *Unutterable*. She it was who told the facts of these instances to her quite insane brother—but most people were insane by then—and he was indirectly responsible for their appearance in print.

She had to *tell* him, though, for as she was bending over Michael's body a few minutes after the cavalcade had passed, a long, lean, golden thing (she never knew it to be a stoat) leapt up at her face and bit it. Eyes make sumptuous banquets for the little folk.

To prove that the wheel goes full circle, the brother of Michael Purves's bar acquaintance, when he had recovered from the endless shocks of the day, telephoned the *Daily Flare* with his version of the story and added:

"After that weasel had bitten my sister's eyes out, a man in a Rolls—I've got his name, the Honourable George Selby—passed by and brought her into Leamington to hospital. He was motoring to his home up north—yes, I've a telephone number here."

George Selby lived in the grey stone house which folks said was ghost-haunted, underneath the hill on which Pan had stood. He had got as far as the iron bridge over the Coquet at the foot of his drive when a herd of very mad, or very wise, Highland cattle tumbled him and his car politely into the river ten feet below. And they say he blew bubbles as he drowned, just like those a carp makes as it is basking near the surface on a still summer's afternoon; or, of course, it may have been the exhaust working over-time. Which was why the *Daily Flare* was never able to interview him.

But to approach the matter correctly one needs must peer into Fleet Street, into the grotesquely glass-fronted offices of the *Daily Flare*. It was easy to peer into them, easier than usual, for two L.M.S. dray horses had contrived to back their delivery vans deliciously jaggedly through the windows, had followed themselves. And though one may have spiked himself appallingly and the other ripped a tendon, they at least were able-bodied enough to keep the party going.

Smith, once a colour-sergeant, now a benign commissionaire with a V.C. on his chest gained at Paardeburg, had just time to say: "What the . . . ." at the spectacle, when the near wheel of a bumping van cannoned his reception desk to one side, twisted his chair over with it, and so enabled the offhind foot of a "shire" to imprint itself on that portion of a man's stomach which causes it to go pop.

That was a mere incident, though, as trivial as the remains of a black-coated

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messenger boy when Progress, the other dray horse, had finished mouthing him.

But upstairs, while white-faced people telephoned frantically for the police—and the police were overbusy then—or for troops—they, too, were busy—or for anyone with a rifle or a human killer—the one essential factor in life, the minute-to-minute production of a newspaper, had to be continued, even though it might seem insane to continue it.

"The world's mad! Everyone's mad! and I am cuckoo, too!" mouthed Tom Slowly, the chief sub-editor, as he read the embryo headlines of a newspaper that in a few hours' time would scream the impossible as hard reality.

He ran a hand through cropped grey hair, gazed in bewilderment round the room, and encountered two score of questioning, appalled eyes that somehow answered his unspoken query.

A young, clean-shaven reporter came up to him, handed him three sheets of typewritten copy, said: "Aldershot—four thousand horses broken loose, most of them chargers of light draught—creating havoc—thirty men known to be killed already—troops all called out—orders to shoot on sight."

A telephonist butted in. "I can't take any more, sir, I'm going bughouse, I've had Ellison from Market Harborough, Burrs from Lynn, Jones from Aberdovey, Canvey from Dorchester. God knows how many more. The same story all the time, cattle mad, going mad, God alone knows how many they have killed, and God alone knows how they have killed them. Sheep—that's from Evans, from Tregaron—sheep rushing headlong down from the hills and stamping their shepherds to death. Pigs eating mothers, fathers, babies, and even a dear old grandfather as well." His voice rose to a hysterical scream.

"Don't be a fool, and keep quiet," said Tom Slowly. "It's a story of a lifetime. Hand your copy to Moore quickly. There'll be more coming through." He broke off and turned round suddenly. "Yes," this to the solemn figure of the news editor, "editor wants to see us. Come on." And as the pair walked down the corridor together, "Thank God you came along when you did. I might have panicked otherwise."

SAID Calverley Dexter quietly, and very seriously from his inner sanctum: "Well, what do you make of this? Direct from the Prime Minister—a telephone call. A state of martial law is to be proclaimed. All troops to be mobilized. Special constables to be called out. The Cabinet's meeting now. Newspapers to urge all people to stay at home until—God knows until when. All schools and everything to be closed. Local authorities to arrange for armed escorts of necessary food supplies. Funny isn't it?" He grinned grimly.

"All gas supplies to be cut off," he continued. "Why? Oh, you haven't heard yet, I suppose. The Prime Minister told me. It applies to the towns mainly. Sewer rats have eaten into or burrowed under and broken the main pipes all over the place. Half the towns in England are lacking electric light, too; but the townsfolk, anyway, are safer. They are only liable to be gassed or electrocuted.

"I gather the country's hell. Oh, yes, we'll produce a newspaper as long as we can. God knows how we can circulate it though. The B.B.C. are coming in on the job, too. Yes the railway lines are up. There are a million, two million beasts loose on them, or on the roads, breaking down telegraph poles, stamping hell out of stucco-brick villas and stucco souls; it's chaos! It's impossible!"

An unheard voice whispered in his mind. "It's Pan leading the world against man and, great God, he looks very much like winning."

The telephone bell rang. Calverley Dexter's voice became intensely grave. "Is it as bad as that, sir? Whatever you order will be done. Of course, sir. Thank you."

Then he smiled as he hung up the receiver, rather like a certain general smiled at Loos when he realized that he had to attack minus all supports.

"Well, gentlemen, I don't think it's

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much good even printing a paper to-night. You will get no more news, early though it is. The birds have joined in the racket. They have broken the main telegraph wires by their weight. They have linked themselves into winged aerials and connected up the grid cables. They may have killed a million of themselves, but they have now ruined the electric supply of pretty well all England, London at the moment excepted. There will be a host of wrecks tonight and a host of train smashes, and Heaven knows how many car smashes. That was Field-Marshal Sir George Murgatroyd speaking. He has been appointed the big panjandrum to deal with the matter.

"His orders are the same as the Prime Minister's. Martial law—hell!" This as the light went suddenly, pitching the room into the half-dusk of an autumn evening. "This is the end."

The telephone bell rang. Calverley Dexter smiled very grimly. "What's up now, I wonder?" he muttered and then, receiver to his ear, his voice rose crescendo. "Darling! No! O God! I'll come as quickly as I can, as quickly as I can." The telephone dropped from his hand, he gaped, face going greyer and greyer.

"My dog—little terrier—he's gone mad—killed my boy—my wife had to beat him to death with a poker before she could get him off. I'm going home, I must."

"Hell!" shouted Tom Slowly, a proud father and a real dog lover. "Don't you see all the animals are against us? I've a mastiff at home alone with my wife and daughter. Let me telephone."

The door slammed behind him. Calverley Dexter rose, pulled on a hat, shouted to the news editor, "Hold the fort for me. You're lucky. You're a widower with grown-up daughters, anyway. I must get home."

And quite suddenly the news editor dropped the reserved manner which had been his for twenty-five years and yelled out: "Don't be a fool, you can't. Look there, there at the window, which isn't a window. There's no light coming through it at all. It's as black, black as your top-hat, black with bats, bats, bats, hundreds of them crawling against the glass. Where the hell do they come from? What do they want? My God! They want you, Dexter; you and me perhaps. . . ."

Tom Slowly ran shouting into the big room up to his desk and into the arms of a woman, the news editor's secretary, who coughed blood at him from a hole in her throat, shrieked: "The cat!" and tore with mad fingers at a four taloned, scraping wound that had ripped her face from side to side.

"The cat! The cat!" she bubbled. The black blood trickled down her neck on to her white blouse. "He's killed me, killed. . . ." She sank into a heap on the floor.

An ashen-faced reporter bent forward with the words: "The office cat, you know, that foul black brute. She was telephoning. I was waiting for a railway voucher from her and suddenly he sprang, ripped her throat out before I could do anything. I've killed him, though, now—smashed his damned head in with a telephone."

Click!

"What the hell's that?"

A portable wireless, used normally to receive and check up S.O.S. messages, boomed out the words:

This is the B.B.C. calling, calling a national S.O.S. All persons owning any pet domestic animals are advised to keep them locked up and to treat them as wild animals until they can be examined by a veterinary surgeon; or else they are advised to destroy them immediately.

The recent incredible ravages and the destruction caused by wild and farmyard animals reached a climax today.

They have been superseded, though, by an appalling outbreak of perhaps rabies or some form of madness in the dogs and cats and parrots and other animals we normally call our pets. It has caused them to attack their owners. There have been many fatalities.

This is a matter of the utmost gravity. The utmost—the utmost—God help me—keep away, keep away, who let those dogs in here—who . . . . ?

TING-A-LING-A-LING! Plomp! Sir Francis Gordon, Bart., millionaire proprietor of the *Daily Flare*, heaved himself from a sofa, saw the head of a shaggy-coated dog on his chest—his "Prince," king of all deer-hounds—mouth open, tongue hanging out, struck him a blow, heard the dog whine, and saw it slither off the sofa, on to which it had jumped.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling! "The telephone of course," he muttered, and then to the dog, "Keep away, keep away, damn you. Keep down. Leave me alone." His face was rimed with sweat, his eyes tear-filled, staring. Mechanically he reached out his hand, placed the receiver to his ear, said half-doubtingly, "Yes, yes, who wants me?" and from the far distance came the voice of Mr. Calverley Dexter.

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"Is that you, sir? Dexter speaking. Hope I didn't disturb you."

"My God! Disturb me?" shouted Sir Francis Gordon. "Disturb me! Are you all right? Is the paper all right? Is the world all right?"

"Absolutely, sir," came back a cheerful voice. "There's nothing wrong with you, though, is there? You sound as if you're worried, afraid of something."

Francis Gordon chuckled suddenly. He had a sense of humour. "That's all right, Calverley. I was at one moment—had a hard day's shooting. Been asleep afterwards, and had one hell of a nightmare. All over now, though. How is the paper looking? That's fine. You want to hit Haversham in that by-election. He's a fool—also he's on the wrong side. Be kind to Moffat with his cement companies—they're sound and will make money. The leaders have been lacking pep recently. Tell Lewis to buck them up a bit. What's your main story to-night? Oh, Prince Pervani and his bride. Humph! Good stuff that. Any other news?"

The line cleared suddenly, became crystal clear.

Over it came Calverley Dexter's carefully modulated words:

"Yes, there is an odd story—three odd stories in fact—that we are working up. Three separate instances of stevedores killed to-day by snake bites when unloading cargoes at Hull, Cardiff, and—"

The line clicked suddenly into nothingness as a wearied telephone operator changed over the wrong connection.

Sir Francis Gordon, sweat streaming down his face, sat rigid, the telephone in his hand, staring into memory, into the fire, into the darkened corner of the room, where Prince, the deer-hound, lay cowed. And suddenly it seemed to him that Prince's lower lip drooped and his teeth showed in a snarl.

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 8)

THE CLASSIC OF THE YEAR

In renewing my subscription for the coming year, I would like to take occasion to comment on the stories printed in the past year in F.F.M.

"The Man Who Was Thursday" in the March issue was, in my opinion, the classic of the year. Magnificently written, it held a great deal of that rare type of humor, *good* satire. Not too far behind were "The Day of the Brown Horde," which, for its vivid description and realistic setting made it the finest story of its kind that I have ever read, and "The Lost Continent," a tale with an engrossing plot and superb continuity.

"The Postman of Otford" was as fine a story of its length as I have ever read. "The Wendigo" also deserves approbation. I read it twice. It seems to me like a fine story to tell around a campfire. As a matter of fact, the only poor story in the past year was "The Ghost Pirates" which gave me a mighty big letdown.

In conclusion, I would like to commend Lawrence for his superlative work, especially the Sept. '44 and Mar. '45 covers. Keep up the good work.

A. E. METZGER

1750 DAVIDSON AVE.,
BRONX 53, N. Y.

SOME F.F.M. RATINGS

After two years under Popular's management F.F.M. is slowly winning its way back to the position it occupied in the fantasy field as a Munsey publication. There have been a few setbacks, and once, as far as I was concerned, F.F.M. was down for a nine count. I refer to the March 1944 issue which featured "The Man Who Was Thursday" by G. K. Chesterton. Honestly, that yarn was awful. It was putrid. It was the only copy of F.F.M. that I ever regretted buying. Hodgson's "Ghost Pirates" was all that kept that issue from being a complete washout. I didn't care much for "The Iron Star" in the September 1943 issue either, but it was a gem compared to "TMWWT." No more Chesterton, *Please!*

Taine's "Greatest Adventure" is the best novel you have printed under Popular, closely followed by "Three Go Back," "Lost Continent," "Ark of Fire" and "Day of the Brown Horde." Note that I said best novel; the best story of any length was C. L. Moore's "Doorway into Time" in the September 1943 issue. Now, *there* was a story! It compared favorably with the best of the Munsey classics. More Moore, please!

I have every issue of F.F.M. from the first Sept.-Oct. 1939 issue to the present time and would be willing to dispose of same. So, if anyone wanting back copies will get in touch with me I will supply them.

L. A. HUGHES

R. F. D. #1,
TUPELO, MISSISSIPPI

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

SOME FAULT-FINDING

First, a few words about myself. I, too, hail from a lost continent. Every year, from April to September, vast throngs of my fellow beings assemble in huge stadia to do homage to their gods, affectionately called DEMBUMS. This year, much to my sorrow, Giants have invaded these stadia and have done much to humiliate our gods.

With great faith in DEMBUMS, I hope to see these Giants defeated.

"The Lost Continent," by Cutcliffe Hyne, is to me still a mystery as to where it borders on the fantastic. With all due apologies to the editor, I must protest. You have reprinted excellent stories in the past. Why have you forsaken us?

To elaborate, if Mr. Hyne, intended to write in a subjective fashion, he should have done so, in toto. The same holds true for objectivism. Mr. H. mixes both and they, like oil and water, don't mix. The chief mistakes as I see them are as follows:

If the hero was named Deucalion, the heroine should have been Pyrrha. To complete the legend, Deucalion was the son of Prometheus and the spouse of Pyrrha. At least the Greeks in their mythology tell me as much. When the great god Zeus destroyed the rest of mankind by flood, the ark bearing Deucalion and Pyrrha came to rest on Mt. Parnassus. Pursue further the Dialogues of Plato, especially Timaeus and Critias and you will find that there were a great number of elephants on Atlantis. A general plan is given of the docks, royal palaces, bridges, temples, the pouring of libations etc., etc.

If Mr. H. had stuck to pure fiction and let well enough alone, the story might have attained perfection. If he had banked entirely upon mythology, the result would have been excellent. Instead the writer invents beautiful situations, an almost compelling narrative style, and bungles to a denouément that is tritely patent. In the last few pages, the pants have to fit Mr. Deucalion because they were already in the closet of Mr. Hynes' mind.

The Duke is Viceroy of Yucatan and after twenty years reign is recalled to Atlantis. He gets shoved around, becomes a hobo for about eight years and finally reclaims Nais. He is then renamed Old Mose. Let us say he was about forty or more when he first became Viceroy. Accordingly I am from Missouri, short i. Little mistakes like this can drive a reader nuts.

The Duke buys Phorenice a present which she calls bonny. Shades of Robert Burns!

If a person wishes to escape such destructive criticism, let him be implicity careful or wildly imaginative and inventive.

The illustrations were adequate and showed that the artists knew what they were drawing about.

Lord Dunsany is Grade AAA.

JACK ROSENBLATT

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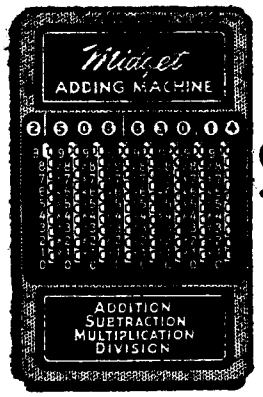

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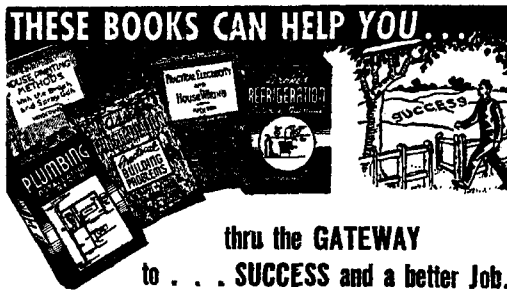

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

KUTTNER SHORT A CLASSIC

Enclosed please find $1.25, for which please renew my subscription for one year, and send me one Lawrence porfolio.

F.F.M. is the only mag that has kept up its fine standard in this year of war. By far the best story of the year was Taine's "The Greatest Adventure." It was very well worked out, and the sheer magnificence of Taine's plots will never cease to amaze me. It was more than a story, it was a warning!

"The Machine Stops" was a good story, but not up to standard. "Before I Wake . . ." was quite another matter. This short was a classic, one of the best shorts that I have read in a long time. Every once in a while, Kuttner turns out a great story. These times are well worth waiting for.

By all means give us more of Taine. His "Iron Star" is my favorite of all the fantasy I have ever read. Although you have given us his best, there is still "Before The Dawn," "The Purple Sapphire," and "Gold Tooth."

"Quayle's Invention," while a great story, has not enough fantasy for F.F.M.

KENT HARMON.

627 CHANNING AVE.,
PALO ALTO, CALIF.

MARCH F.F.M. BEST YET

I think the March F.F.M. is about the best yet. "The Machine Stops" is a real good story. The cover and illustrations by Lawrence were fine. I think that is almost as good as Finlay and that's saying a lot.

I am sending $1.25 for one year subscription and a Lawrence Portfolio.

Now for the stories I would like to see in F.F.M.: "Star Maker," "Last and First Men," "Last Men in London," "Odd John," and "Warring World"—all by Olaf Stapledon. Any story by Taine, Wright, Dunsany, Wells.

Do you have any old copies of F.F.M. or F.N.? If so I would like to have them. Please print this letter and maybe some fan that has some old copies will write to me.

CECIL PURDY

R. 5,
CULLMAN, ALA.

Editor's Note: We have no back issues at all.

"MACHINE SHOPS"—ENGROSSING

You've won your subscription and I now pray that you are satisfied and will change the title of F.F.M. It's this way: I finally became weary of going to a magazine stand with my collar turned up and very stealthily reaching up (after ascertaining that no one was looking my way) and grasping the finest fantasy published. Seriously though the title does belie the contents.

Chad Oliver had the right idea in calling for an editor's page. It lends the personal touch.

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However if there is no room, some answers would suffice. I've noticed that every issue contains an abundance of questions coupled with a sparsity of answers.

Turning to the March issue, "The Machine Stops" was an engrossing story. The plot was somewhat novel (for a change) and well developed and aside from the supposed love interest it made excellent reading.

I can't say that Kuttner's story exactly inspired me. It didn't have much to it. If you must have a short story try something that packs a real punch such as "The Kennel."

Personally I prefer the medium length novelette such as "The Wendigo" (a remarkable story to say the least. More of Blackwood).

Glad to see that next issue doesn't contain a story of the past or future so it must be good. At least it's unique. Writers must think that by merely throwing in a dinosaur or a rocket ship they have an excellent story. E.R.B. stands alone in being able to write a really fine past or future story. Let's have something really original! Lovecraft for instance.

I'd like to join the growing list of dreamers by picturing magazines overflowing with Burroughs. Wells, Lovecraft, and Weinbaum.

If by some slim chance this letter is printed I would like to ask anyone having any E.R.B. that has not been published in book form to contact me. Also any other extraordinary fantasy would be "given a good home."

HOWARD SCHUMAN

1104 SUNNYSLOPE, DR.
CINCINNATI, OHIO

SMITH'S YARN "TOO CRUEL"

I didn't like "The Machine Stops;" it is too cruel. I have no doubt that if people are starving they might act that way but I don't care to read about it. It certainly makes one wonder though what the world would be like if such a thing would happen. I guess it would be about the way Mr. Smith writes about it. I liked "The Lost Continent" much better. Anyway it is a story I can look forward to reading again from time to time.

I like stories of ancient history better than modern ones, also stories of other planets such as "Palos of the Dog Star Pack." I see where another fan would like Haggard's "Allan Quatermain" stories, and so would I. Sure wish F.F.M. could go monthly again. Am so afraid I will miss one sometime. I mark the date on the calendar when the next one is to be out and there I am at the newsstand a week ahead of time asking for F.F.M., hoping it will be early. It is still my favorite, even if I can't like every story.

Lawrence's cover was certainly realistic this time though I still like Finlay the best. Why are the fans picking on the cover for "The Lost Continent?" I think it was o.k. I imagine Cleopatra must have looked a lot like it.

P. H. MALONE

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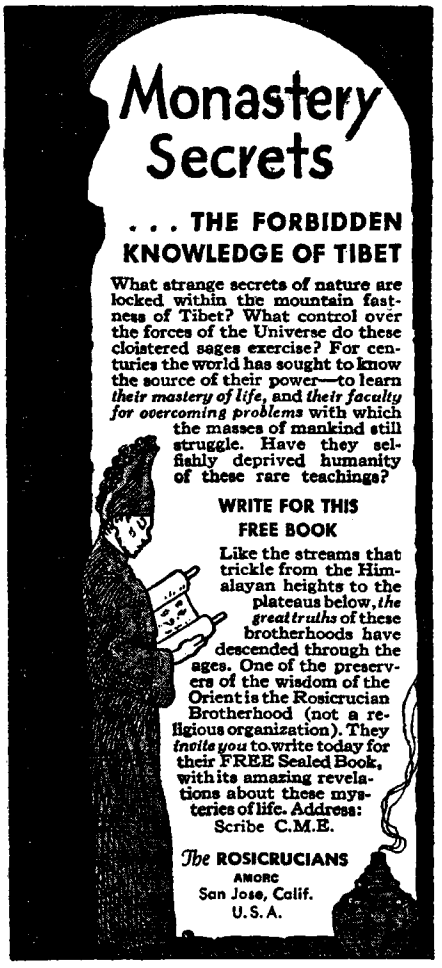
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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

KUTTNER PRAISED

There is not a single fantastic piece of art work in the whole March issue. That goes for the cover, too. However, none of the pix was bad.

The lead novel was no classic, but still was quite good. Reminded me of Thomas Calvert McClary's "Rebirth" in many respects.

Kuttner did all right this issue.

Suggestions: First—yeah, you've guessed it—"Etadorpha." I don't know why I'm howling for it; I've never read it. All I know is that it is the story of a man taken on a subterrean voyage by a strange, quasi-human creature.

Get something by Lovecraft, preferably "At the Mountains of Madness," "Shadow Out of Time," and "Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadeth."

They say it is easy to get the works of Stapledon and others of the masters; it applies only to the larger cities like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, etc., to my knowledge. Here in the Crescent City it's practically impossible to get even H. G. Wells! This is probably true in the smaller cities and towns all over the country, so please print Stapledon, Taine and the others.

EMILE E. GREENLEAF, JR.
1303 MYSTERY ST.,
NEW ORLEANS 19, LA.

HELP FROM N. Z.

In your letter to me of June 14th, 1944, you mentioned having been unable to trace "The Secret of the Sphinx" by Carew.

It so happens that I came into possession of a copy of this book yesterday, and am sending it to you under separate cover; I realize, of course, that in the interim you may have obtained the book from some other source, and if this is the case I hope you are not caused too great an inconvenience by my sending you the book.

Otherwise, you may be able to use the book to advantage; I very much hope so.

I am sending you the book without reading it, so cannot make any remarks about it.

I should like to have the book back when you have finished with it, not because I place any great value upon it myself, but because I may be able to exchange it for something in the fantasy field that I am eager to obtain.

If you know of anyone who has for exchange "The Woman of the Wood," by Merritt, and/or the Arkham House Lovecraft omnibus "The Outsider and Others" I should be very grateful if you would let me know of them; I have an old copy (1916 English edition) of the "King in Yellow" which some fans might be glad of.

THOS. G. L. COCKCROFT
7 ROSLYN ROAD,
NAPIER, NEW ZEALAND

Editor's Note: We receive much help of this kind. We have decided that the Carew book will not serve, but we were very grateful for the opportunity to see it.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

"HIGHWAYMAN" BEST

I feel in the letter writing mood tonight, so I thought I would do you the *honor* of writing a letter for your readers' column.

So I'll start at the er—cover. Cover? Did I say cover? I'm not going to go into any long harangue about it, but I would like to say it wasn't very good. As usual, Lawrence's colors seem muddy, and he appears to have gone over the painting with thick ink to make it stand out. Not so much this time, but look at the cover illustrating "The Man Who Was Thursday" and you'll see what I mean. All in all, Lawrence's covers don't have the delicacy of Finlay's.

Idea of the week! There is only one artist in the S.F.—Fantasy field today who can even come near Virgil Finlay, and that is a young fellow by the name of Hannes Bok.

Now for the cover story. One of my pet peeves is Atlantis stories. You always know how they're going to turn out.

Ah, but now comes the cream of the contents! I don't even have to mention its name, but I shall. "The Highwayman" by Dunsany. I only have to quote Paul Carter's letter in your last issue: "That, gentlemen, was not a short story—it was a poem."

Well, there doesn't seem to be much else left in the issue except the most boring of all the mags' letter columns. When I say that the "Readers' Viewpoint" is the most boring, I don't mean the letters, which are entertaining enough. I mean the way in which it is conducted.

Here is the whole question in a nutshell: Why don't you answer our questions? After all, when a reader writes in and gives a suggestion or two, maybe asks a few questions, he'd like a little recognition from the editor. For instance, if I ask "What has happened to the 'King In Yellow', will you answer? Or maybe you'll include it in the next issue? I know there is a manpower shortage, but—please!

C. S. G.

Editor's Note: The remaining stories in "The King in Yellow" are not as fantastic as much other available material which has come to our attention recently.

LIKES ADVENTURE FANTASIES

I have every issue of both F.F.M. and F.N., and just this fall had them all bound. I was lucky enough too, to have the "missing link" of most of the trilogies, from the old *Argosy-All-Story* or *Argosy*, so had them bound right along with the trilogy they went with. All but the two "Minos of Sardanes" and "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian," which I would very much like to obtain, either by a reprinting of them, or from someone who has an extra copy.

I see some of your readers ask for slick paper, trimmed edges, or different kind of covers; personally I don't care in the least about these! The stories are what I'm after, and as long as I get them, with the same good class of illustra-

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And *please,* don't do what Thomas Cockcroft suggests—have a whole issue sometimes of nothing but short stories; I simply dote on most of your long novels, but very few of the shorter ones appeal to me. Even Lovecraft and the much-praised "King in Yellow" fail to give me a thrill; Dunsany is just so-so, and most of the others are not much better, in my opinion. And still more, pretty, *pretty please,* don't do as Tom Pace suggested, and make a bigger magazine. As I said, I'm binding mine, and bigger magazines simply don't make a book compact enough to handle well. (Not to mention they cost a lot more to have bound!)

I like all the long stories you have printed since your change in policy except "The Man Who Was Thursday," which to my mind wandered along too much like a nightmare, and after one had finished it, one was still wondering just how the characters got that way, and what it was all about. Atlantis stories, caveman stories, stories of the past and of the future, they are all O.K. by me. Although I do like the "fantastic adventure" type better than the simply weird and spooky ones, which maybe is why I don't care for Lovecraft and Dunsany, at least as printed by you so far.

And would it be possible (I see nearly everyone else has asked this, but I'm going to, too) to get some able author to finish the Merritt stories and print them? Nobody could hope to finish them in quite the vein that that master of fantastic fiction could, but—who could bear to read an unfinished one? They grip one so that I, for one, could hardly bear to start one, and then not get to finish it. And—a half a loaf is better than none!

I have an extra copy of Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar," "Metal Monster," and one of "The Sun Makers," which I will be glad to send to anyone who wants them. And, if I can get them, I would very much like to find someone who has extra copies of the last three installments of Eando Binder's "Lords of Creation," which came in *Argosy* four or five years ago, and the first installment of "Three Against the Stars," by Eric North, which appeared at about the same time.

(Mrs.) C. W. Vallette
Declo, Idaho

SOLDIER'S REQUEST

Enclosed $.75 for Lawrence Portfolio.

Can you give me any advice as to where I can dispose of back issue magazines and first edition books? I have F.F.M., F.N., *Unknown, Astounding,* Etc., and Wells, Merritt, Burroughs.

Pvt. Robert J. Smith
c/o F.F.M.

ANOTHER OF THE GIRLS

May a lady add her 2 cents worth, with pleasure? I think F.F.M. the best magazine on the market today. The greatest story you ever published was "The Blind Spot"; next, "The

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Moon Pool" and "Dwellers in the Mirage."

I've injured my leg and can't walk. So, I'd be glad if any or all who read your fine magazine would drop me a few lines and help me keep my sunny disposition. Please.

BERNICE CHIASSON

P.O. Box 61,
LIVERPOOL, N. S.,
QUEENS CO., CANADA

SUGGESTIONS

I have been reading many different fantasy magazines, but I have found that *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* is the only one that upholds the standards found in pre-war magazines of this type. I think "The Lost Continent," in your December issue is one of the finest examples of a fantasy story I have read lately.

I have read several letters in the Readers' Department critiecizing the cover. But I think the cover is very appropriate. I also enjoyed "The Highwayman" and I think its author, Lord Dunsany, has no parallel in the field of fantasy.

My only objection is that there are not enough stories in your magazine. My suggestion is that your feature should be shorter.

R. J. GENTRY

902 CHURCH ST.,
GRAND PRAIRIE, TEXAS

FINEST IN FANTASY FIELD

Enclosed you will please find $1.25 for a year's subscription to *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and the new Lawrence Portfolio.

Since this is the first, and probably the last, letter I shall ever write to your magazine I would like to get in a few comments about it. First, I believe you have the finest fantasy publication in the field and second, in comparison with the reading matter your covers are by far, usually, the most putrid.

As for the last issue, the cover was better (but don't get me wrong, they aren't *good enough* yet). The lead novel was good, Kuttner's story was superb. Enough said. Keep up the good work.

Yours truly,

DAVID OLSON

429 COLLEGE AVE.,
STORM LAKE, IOWA

WANTS INFORMATION

Since discovering F. F. M. I have scoured all used magazine stores until I have all F. F. M. and three of the *Fantastic Novels* magazine. I need the Vol. 1 No. 1 and Vol. 1 No. 2 of *Fantastic Novels*. Can you help me get them?

I wish to say that you have a great magazine for it brings us classics that are hard to get.

After reading all the fan mail in all these mags I can't see how you can hold out in putting aside your rule and publishing Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar" which so many fellows want. I include myself in this group.

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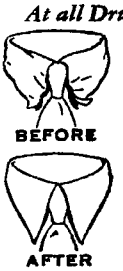

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will prove to yourself that if you publish it, it will sell out sure.

Since you can publish John Taine's works I wish to vote for the three I think best—"Purple Sapphire," Greatest Adventure," and "The Gold Tooth."

ANTHONY RICCARDI.

5718 So. GRAMMERCY PL.,
LOS ANGELES, 37, CALIF.

LIKES HAWKINS' STORIES

Enclosed is my year's subscription to F. F. M. I hope that you will be able to have a portfolio of Lawrence's drawings very soon.

I enjoyed reading the "Ark of Fire." Perhaps the Hawkins brothers could be persuaded to do a new story for F. F. M.

I'm rather sorry that you are not using stories that have previously appeared in magazines. We are losing the rest of Merritt's work as well as most of the works of many of the great science-fiction authors. I'm fairly certain that more science-fiction and fantasy has appeared in magazine than has in book form! I was rather hoping to see reprints from other than Munsey magazines. Is there any chance of seeing some of Jack Williamson's, John W. Campbell's, C. L. Moore's, E. E. Smith's, and Raymond J. Gallun's classic stories in print again? Most of these appeared quite some time ago and I don't believe anyone would have any objection to their being reprinted.

Anyhow, keep publishing the old classics unless you can get hold of a really good new story. Perhaps a new one by Merritt? Your artistry is the best in an stf or fantasy magazine, so no kicks are coming there—just keep then on the job.

OWEN WOODRUFF.

Editor's Note: We have not changed our policy concerning stories from other magazines.

INTERESTING SUGGESTION

I have been an ardent Merritt fan since I first read his "Snake Mother."

I'm really sorry that F. F. M. is no longer reprinting the "classics" as I call them—so here is a suggestion of mine:

In 1881 Gebbie and Co. published "The Illustrated History of Rome." It was published in an interesting and novel method. You subscribed for the set—and every two months you received a section, at fifty cents a copy. This went on until you had the complete set, then G. and Co. suggested where you could have the set bound—"in two volumes" etc.

Now then, since publications of Merritt's stories are so rare—practically priceless—why couldn't something like "The History of Rome" be attempted—only with "The Complete Works of Merritt."

Every month, or every other month, a different Merritt story would come out to all subscribers of this service, until finally they had a complete set.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

By the way, the stories would be illustrated with the original Finlay illustrations.

I am sure that if *enough* fans got together, and *enough* signed a pledge to subscribe they could apply to a publishing house who would do the job (arrange copyright, etc.)

Think it over, F.F.M. editors, and see how it sounds.

Now that F. F. M. is reprinting only books, why don't you print some of Haggard's books? They're very good, all of them. "She" for example.

RICHARD STOCKTON.

1600 CAMINO SIERRA,
BAKERSFIELD, CALIF.

NO HORROR STORIES, PLEASE

I agree completely with Wasso about making movies about scientifiction and fantasy. Hollywood (the curse of the Pharaohs upon its head) ruined Hilton's "Lost Horizon" by "improving" it. If they tried something like Weinbaum's "Martian Odessy" they'd either make so full of action that only ten-year-olds would like it, or would use so much romance that only adults could bear it.

"Three Go Back" was a real treat. So were Bradbury's "King of the Gray Spaces," and Chambers' "The Mask." More from "The King in Yellow," please. But I couldn't endure Hodgson's "The Derelict." It was too much like that cheap horror stuff you hear all the time over the radio.

Why don't you print Weinbaum's "New Adam"? And H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds"? Conan Doyle's "Lost World"? Then there's a story called "Etidorhpa," or something like that, the author's name of which I don't know. It is very rare, but it was printed about the time of Chamber's "King in Yellow," and someone who read it said that it is a very exceptional story, for the author swears that it's *true!* But don't print "Frankenstein" and "Dracula." Too much of the horror story angle.

Let's get down to details.

I liked "The Mask" better than "Yellow Sign." Reason: The latter was too much the horror story.

My point! Keep all such horror stories out of F. F. M.

Bradbury's stories have a certain appeal about them. I don't know how to describe it, but it's that something makes it impossible not to like his work. Oh! Yes! I forgot something. See if you can get more of Henry Kuttner's stories. He can write stories that are beautiful.

Give us more "planetary" adventure.

EMILE E. GREENLEAF, JR.

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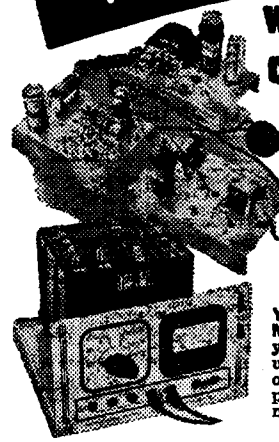

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

Oliver, for instance). I have only seven F.F.M.'s, received from my U. S. correspondents. The dearth due to the war of stf. and fantasy magazines here is extremely lamentable to such a rabid fan as yours truly. Lately, though, I've been getting more than usual from my U. S. friends.

I have no criticisms to make, but I do have a couple of suggestions to offer. Change that title. Call the magazine anything as long as you lop off "mysteries." It's not a mystery magazine, so don't imply that it is by the title. *Fantasy Classics* would be much more appropriate. Another thing, let Bok do a cover. An illustration similar to his on the "Out of Space and Time" jacket would improve the appearance of your magazine a great deal. Which reminds me, how about some of C. A. Smith's stuff? He can't be beat for sheer fantasy.

In closing, I say to all of you at F.F.M., "Thanks a million for the first *great* fantasy magazine."

Thanks for listening.

NORMAN S. BARRETT.

467 BONAVENTURE ST.,
THREE RIVERS, QUE.

SUGGESTIONS

I'm not writing this letter to tell you how much I enjoy the stories, or drool over the illustrations, or want trimmed edges. I'm not even going to say you're my favorite mag, because you aren't. (You're No. 3 on my list.) No, I won't say anything like that. I'm just writing to give you the names of a few books I'd like to see in print.

"Beware After Dark"—T. Everett Harre (A collection of shorts. Surely you would be able to pick out about one or two); "Presenting Moonshine"—John Collier (Shorts. These are excellent); "Story of Ab"—Waterloo; "Wonder Stick"—Stanton A. Coblentz (Don't know if this was ever in a mag); "Vandals of the Void"—J. M. Walsh; "Brave New World"—Aldous Huxley; "Devil's Highway"—H. B. Wright & John Lebar (Wright, Jr.); "Coming of the Amazons"—Owen Johnson; "Prince of Atlantis"—L. E. Roy; "Before Adam"—London.

How about S. V. Benét? Surely some of his have never been in magazines before.

LESTER MAYER, JR.

592 MAIN AVE.,
PASSAIC, N. J.

A "MERRITT COLLECTION"?

Please accept my remittance for one year of your F.F.M. I have been a reader since your first copy was published and still have it. I was indeed sorry to hear of the passing of A. Merrit as his "Moon Pool" published many years ago in the *Argosy*, which went under another name then, was my first introduction to fantastic stories. I would like to begin a collection of A. Merritt stories in book form. How does one go about starting such a collection? I am sure if you could publish his works in book form you would have many takers. This is the

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first letter I have ever sent to you and I would like to know how your readers feel about starting a collection of A. Merritt. Maybe some of us could get together and persuade you to do the publishing. How about it? I am looking forward to the time when I can get F.F.M. more often than quarterly as your stories are more than entertaining.

Hoping to get results about the A. Merritt collection, I remain yours for F.F.M.

VERA Y. DAVIES.

613 56th ST.,
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

"GHOST PIRATES" LIKED

Pleasantly surprised to have my first trial at fan mail printed. You may regret it, because here's another.

About the March issue:

1. "The Man Who Was Thursday (A Nightmare)"—it sure was, wasn't it?

2. "The Ghost Pirates"—as was expected, a super-fantasy.

3. "A. Merritt—A Tribute"—now, what about that? After such a swell biography, you make the mistake of saying "there are some who place 'The Ship of Ishtar' in a high place among Merritt's wonderful stories." Now, we fans *will* want to see it in F.F.M.

I have some issues of F.F.M. left that I'll trade for the following: November, 1939—April, 1940—April, 1941—December, 1941—August, 1942.

So as not to call down the wrath of Chesterton fans upon my head, "Thursday" *was* a good story, but I maintain that it was *not* in good taste in F.F.M. We can always find political satire in any number of learned and well-known tomes. But we cannot find any number of "Ship of Ishtar's." Hint.

More power to Lawrence and to your swell mag.

BOB SMITH.

1834 EYE ST., N. W.,
WASHINGTON, 6, D. C.

LAWRENCE EXCELLENT!

I've just finished a cover-to-cover perusal of the March F. F. M. and find the general quality of its material as good as most slick magazines, if not better.

"The Man Who Was Thursday," by the well-known English author, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, is certainly not the usual type of pulp-mag adventure tale. Most of the story was satire-mystery but the ending was terrific fantasy. All-in-all, an entertaining, skillfully written novel, easily worthy of its place with the other great classics in the pages of F.F.M.

Hodgson's "Ghost Pirates" was a crackerjack sea story but it couldn't hold a candle to "The Derelict."

I close with sincere thanks for the wonderful magazine we're getting—in spite of all my gripes.

JOE KENNEDY.

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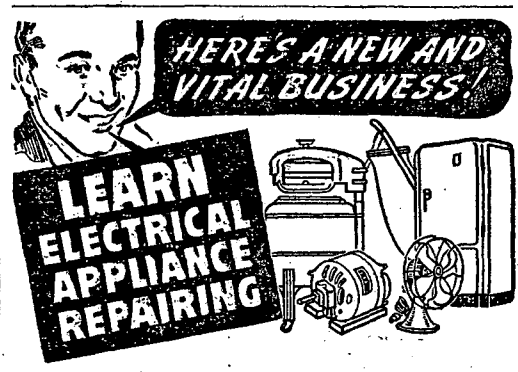

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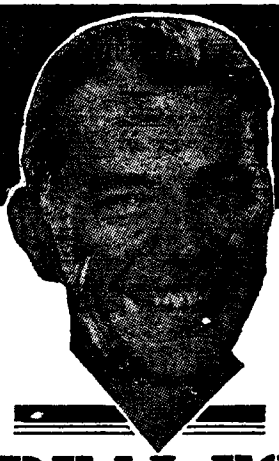

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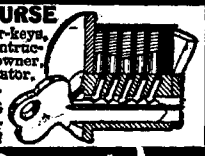

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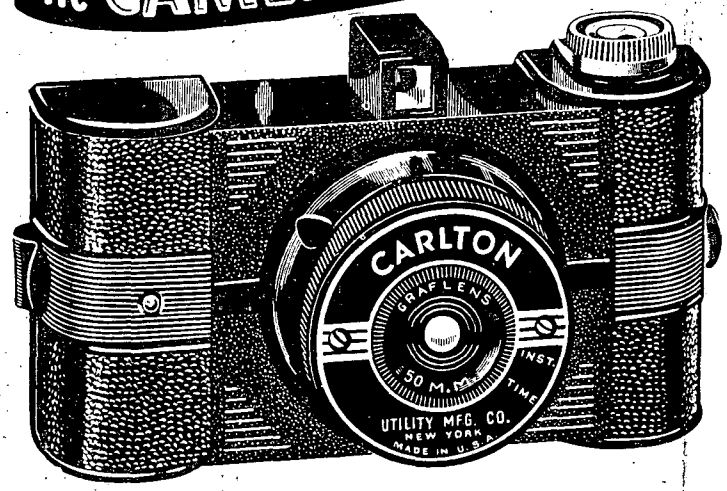

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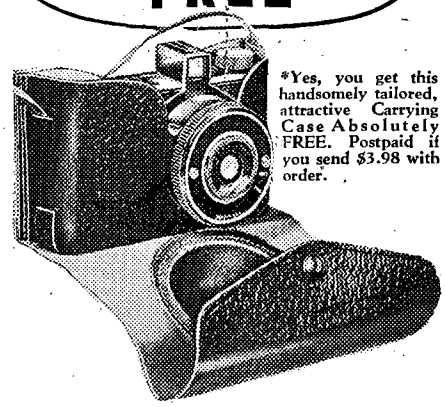

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